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THE WORKS OF

STANLEY HOUGHTON

VOLUME

III

*This Edition consists of one thousand and forty copies, of which one thousand are for sale.*

STANLEY HOUGHTON.

From a snap-shot taken at St. Brelade's Bay, Jersey, in March, 1913.

# THE WORKS OF
# STANLEY HOUGHTON

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

HAROLD BRIGHOUSE

IN THREE VOLUMES

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# ONE ACT PLAYS

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW

## CHARACTERS

Christopher Battersby.

Martha Battersby.

Mary (*their Daughter*).

Edward Fielding (*a Commercial Traveller*).

# THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW

*The scene is laid in the South Cheshire country town of Danesbridge. It is a late autumn evening, chilly and wet. The stage represents an old-fashioned room with wooden beams across the ceiling and walls half panelled. In the middle of the back wall is a large bay window, the panes covered with dark green curtains. Nearest the spectator, on his left, is a door leading to the other part of the house, and farther away a large and roomy fireplace. In the back, to the right of the window, is a door opening into a small hall. From this hall the outer door, which is visible, opens on to the street.*

*In the hall is a hat-stand with a coat, a couple of hats, and an umbrella. An old-fashioned bureau, on which is a large worn Bible, books, papers, and a file of bills, stands in the bay window. On the wall to the right of the spectator a large dresser-sideboard, bearing some old blue and white pottery. By the fire an armchair, another chair, and a small table covered with papers, books, pen, and ink. In the centre of the stage a large oval dining-table covered with a green, gold, and brown cloth. The half nearest the door is spread with a white tray-cloth, and supper for one is laid. There are a piece of cheese, a cottage loaf, butter, a knife, and a spoon, a plate, a glass jug of water, and*

*a tumbler. Three chairs surround the table. A grandfather clock stands at the back on the left of the window opening. The furniture is mahogany and horsehair, comfortable, and well used. The pictures are hunting-scene engravings of Landseer's in old gilt frames, and there is a framed testimonial hung over the mantelpiece. A lighted oil-lamp is on the sideboard, and another on the bureau. There is a chair by the door into the hall.*

*When the curtain rises* CHRISTOPHER *and* MARTHA BATTERSBY *are in the room.* CHRISTOPHER *is a powerfully built man of rather under average height, with a slight stoop. His face is resolute and well lined. He has a firm jaw, with a small, close-cut chin beard. His hair has been sandy brown, but is now nearly iron-grey. He looks more than his age, which is about sixty-three. He is soberly dressed in a rather old-fashioned suit.*

MARTHA *is nearly the same height as her husband. She wears black, with a quaint cap and apron. Her hair is of a dead white, and her face, which is sweet though not strong, bears a sad expression. She is about sixty, but looks more.*

CHRISTOPHER BATTERSBY *is working at a small table near the fire. He is occupied with a mass of papers and books and seems puzzled.* MARTHA *has just finished laying the table. She watches* CHRISTOPHER.

MARTHA. You 're looking worried, Christopher. What 's amiss ?

CHRIS. Eh ?

MARTHA. You 're looking worried.

CHRIS. Ay, I 'm a bit puzzled. It 's these accounts for furnishing the minister's house. I don't understand them altogether.

MARTHA. Put them by for to-night. Edward will be here soon.

CHRIS. Ay, ay, so he will. It 's past nine. He 'll be able to aid me, likely.

MARTHA. Now as if Edward would understand anything about the chapel books.

CHRIS. Why not ? He is a commercial traveller; he must know something about accounts.

MARTHA. Ay, business accounts, not chapel. They 're not the same. Besides, the lad 'll be weary. Bear in mind he 's comin' all the way from Nottingham.

CHRIS. So he will. And hungry. Have ye got him some supper ready ?

MARTHA. There 's a nice new bit o' cheese, and some soup keeping hot in the kitchen.

CHRIS. That 's right. I want Edward to feel at home when he comes here.

MARTHA. Now let me side them papers and things away. I don't feel comfortable with the place so untidy.

CHRIS. Let them be till I 've done, Martha; and then I 'll side them myself. I 'd rather. I don't know where to look for things when you 've put them tidy.

MARTHA. As you please.

CHRIS. I 'll have to see Mr. Dove about these in the mornin'. I doubt I 'm getting too old for Circuit Steward.

MARTHA. Too old indeed ! You 're tired to-night, that 's all.

CHRIS. (*goes to bureau to consult a file of papers*). Ay, perhaps I am. I 'd a long walk this forenoon to Jacob Bowers.

MARTHA (*sitting by fire*). And how is he ?

CHRIS. Poorly, poorly—and the bailiff's threatening again.

MARTHA. Ay. Did you——?

CHRIS. I lent him five pounds, Martha. It 's a deal o' money, but he 's a chapel member—and we 've no other use for our money now.

MARTHA. Don't say that, Christopher.

CHRIS. (*rapping on bureau*). Now, now ! We 'll not talk of that.

(MARTHA *sighs.* CHRISTOPHER *comes back to his table and applies himself to his work. A slight pause.*)

CHRIS. Surely Edward should be here now.

MARTHA. Likely the train 's late. Doesn't it seem good to have him coming again ? Sometimes I feel as though he was really our own son.

CHRIS. Ay, he 's a good lad ; though he never was so fond of the chapel.

MARTHA. Eh, but to think of what might have been if Providence hadn't ordained things otherwise. He might have been bringing the lass with him.

CHRIS. Martha ! We 'll not speak of that, neither.

MARTHA. No, you never will.

CHRIS. No. And I 'll not have you speak of it. She 's gone, and she 's not to be mentioned.

MARTHA (*sighing*). Very well, Christopher.

(*A long pause.* MARTHA *dabs her eyes with a handkerchief, and* CHRISTOPHER *wrinkles*

*his brows over his work. A knock is heard at the outer door.*)

MARTHA. That 'll be Edward. (*She hurries to the door.*)

CHRIS. (*looking up*). Ay. (*He resumes his work.*)

(MARTHA *opens the door, showing the hall, and then opens the outer door.*)

(EDWARD *in coat and hat comes into the hall. He is an easy, comfortable-looking man of about twenty-eight, inclined to stoutness, with a good-natured, weak, and rather red face, and a slight sandy moustache. Altogether he seems rather commonplace.*)

EDWARD. Well, mother, and how are you ? (*She is about to kiss him.*) No, wait a bit. My coat's wet. It 's raining. (*He hangs his coat on a hook in the hall.*) Now then.

MARTHA (*kissing him*). My dear lad. But if your coat 's wet, and it is that, it mustn't stay here. I 'll put it before t' fire to dry. (*She takes it.*)

EDWARD. You 're very good. Father in, eh ?

(*He enters room followed by* MARTHA.)

MARTHA. Ay, he 's in, and a rare mess he 's making with his books and papers and what-not all over the place. But it 's no use talking to him.

CHRIS. (*rising*). Now, Martha, stop your chattering. Well, lad, so you 're in Danesbridge agen. (*Places his hand on* EDWARD'S *shoulder.*)

EDWARD. Yes. But I 'm only here for to-night. We 've not done much business in Danesbridge of late, and trade 's so bad now I can't waste time. I 've to call at Bollinwich, Port Stock, and Wirkchester to-morrow.

(MARTHA *puts coat to dry on chair by fire and goes out into the kitchen.*)

CHRIS. Well, well, sit down. There 's a bit of supper waiting for ye. Have ye no luggage ?

EDWARD. There 's my bag and a skip of samples. The outporter 's bringing them on. He 'll be round in half an hour or so.

CHRIS. Ah ! I 'm just a bit bothered with these chapel accounts. I suppose ye 'd not care to help me with them, eh ? Too tired ?

EDWARD. Well—I can't say I 'm keen on it just now.

CHRIS. All right ! all right ! I 'll leave them to-night.

EDWARD. You don't mind ?

CHRIS. Not a bit, lad, not a bit. (*He gathers up the papers and puts them on the bureau.* EDWARD *crosses to the fire and stands with his back to it.*)

(*Enter* MARTHA.)

MARTHA. Christopher, you never thought to get that beer in for Edward.

CHRIS. Eh, no ! It went clean out of my head. We don't drink it, as you know, Edward ; but I 'm a broad-minded man. I don't object to it in moderation. Would ye like a bottle ?

EDWARD. I wouldn't mind one. There 's not much body in water.

MARTHA. I thought he would.

CHRIS. I 'll run out to the Rose and Lion for one.

EDWARD. You 're very good.

CHRIS. My coat 's in the lobby, eh, Martha ?

MARTHA. On the hook.

(CHRIS. *goes out and closes door. Shortly after the noise of the outer door closing is heard.*)

MARTHA. Well, Edward, it 's good to see you again. How are your mother and sisters ?

EDWARD. Oh, I think they 're all right.

MARTHA. Think ! You ought to know. You 've just left them.

EDWARD. Eh. Yes—of course. Oh, they 're very well. Mother sent her love.

MARTHA. Thank you. Give her mine when you get home. Eh, it seems a long time since you all left here.

EDWARD. It 's just over two years.

MARTHA. Two years. Ah ! And you still like Nottingham ?

EDWARD. Fairly. But there 's no question of liking. My getting the place as traveller at the lace factory meant living there, and there was no help for it.

MARTHA. And such a blow to me it was, your going, Edward. You don't know how lonely I feel at times. I 'd got to look on you as a son, as you should have been by now.

EDWARD. You oughtn't to be lonely. I 'm sure he 's good enough to you. (*Nods towards door through which* CHRIS. *has gone.*) Cheer up !

MARTHA. Oh, he 's kind enough. But he 's bound up in the chapel. I 'm not so fond of it as he is. Sometimes (*she looks round fearfully*) I think they 're not Christian enough at the chapel. They preach too much out of the Old Testament.

EDWARD. Well, it 's all one. (*Laughing.*) All the same book, eh ?

MARTHA. No. The Old Testament 's so much crueller than the New. But that 's not all.

Christopher 's good to me—but it 's a child's love I want. Living here 's been like living in a house without windows since—since——

EDWARD. Ay.

MARTHA. Since Mary went away. The light 's all gone out of the house.

EDWARD. Mr. Battersby—doesn't he speak of her ?

MARTHA. Never a word.

EDWARD. And you 've never heard anything of her ?

MARTHA. No.

EDWARD. Ah, I 'm sorry for you.

MARTHA. It 's very good of you to come and stay with us when you visit Danesbridge. It comforts me a good deal. And she going and leaving you the week before you should have been wed !

EDWARD (*getting uncomfortable*). 'M, yes.

MARTHA. And you loved her so.

EDWARD. Oh ay—I did.

MARTHA. And you still love her ?

EDWARD. 'M—well—I 've told you so many a time, mother, haven't I ?

MARTHA. Ay, ay. But I like you to tell me every time, lest you may have changed.

EDWARD. Well—I 've—I 've not—I 've not.

MARTHA. And you 'd still marry her if she came back ?

(EDWARD *grimaces to himself and scratches his head.*)

You would ?

EDWARD. There 's not much fear of her coming back now.

MARTHA. She may. I pray for it every day. You 'd still marry her ?

EDWARD. Haven't I told you so many a time ?

MARTHA. But you 've not altered ? You would still ?

EDWARD (*uncomfortably*). Oh, yes, yes, yes, of course, mother. (*He kisses her.*) Don't worry about that.

MARTHA. Oh, I 'm thankful. There 's just that that 's keeping me up still. The chance that she may come back and live happy with you, and that Christopher 'll forgive her. It 's something to live for. (*She wipes her eyes.*)

EDWARD. Let 's hope so. Let 's hope so, mother.

(*The door opens and* CHRIS. *appears with a bottle of Bass.*)

CHRIS. I 've been a long time, haven't I ? I met the minister just as I was coming out of the Rose and Lion with the bottle under my arm. He looked a bit taken aback, so I had to stop and explain. He 's not so broad-minded as I am.

(EDWARD *laughs heartily.*)

MARTHA. Dear, dear ! Have you fastened the front door ?

CHRIS. No ; I 've left it on the latch. There 's Edward's luggage to come yet. Now then, Edward—sit down.

EDWARD. I 'd like a bit of a wash first.

CHRIS. Martha, old lady, Edward wants a wash.

MARTHA (*who is just going out*). Eh ? In your old room, Edward, as usual.

EDWARD. I 'll go up then.

MARTHA. Yes. Your soup 'll be in by you 've got down.

(MARTHA *goes out and* EDWARD *is following.*)

CHRIS. Edward. She 's been crying, I see.

EDWARD. Well, a bit. Nothing to speak of.

CHRIS. Been talking of—of her that 's gone ?

EDWARD (*nodding*). 'M.

CHRIS. Ah. I wanted to tell you one thing, Edward, on that subject, and then never to speak of it agen. By rights you should have been my son-in-law at this moment. You 're not, and who 's to blame ? Why, my daughter—that 's gone—to—that 's gone. That being so, there 's no just cause why you should suffer for another's sin. Me and my wife 's comfortably off. After our deaths my property 'll go to you, as by right it should have done if you 'd married her. That 's all.

EDWARD (*scratching his head*). It 's very good of you, Mr. Battersby—but—er—well, there 's one thing you ought to know——

CHRIS. I want to hear nothing, Edward. I 've told you what I 'm set on doing, and nothing you can tell me will alter my mind.

EDWARD. Ah ! (*He stands thinking, perplexed.*)

(*Enter* MARTHA *with a basin of soup.*)

Well, I suppose I 'd better be washing my hands.

(*Exit quickly.*)

MARTHA. Why, he 's not ready now. Well, it 'll keep hot. (*She puts soup on the supper-table.*) What have you been saying to him, Christopher ?

CHRIS. Business, Martha, that you wouldn't understand.

MARTHA. Ay. (*She sits by fire.* CHRIS. *goes to bureau.*)

CHRIS. We 'll read our chapter when Edward 's had

his supper. I 'll find the place. (*He carries a large worn Bible to the oval table in the centre, and places it on the half which is not laid for supper.*) Where had we got to ?

MARTHA. It 's the eighth chapter of St. John to-night.

CHRIS. (*turning the leaves*). The eighth chapter of St. John ?

MARTHA. Yes. I 'm so glad we 're in the New Testament again. I wish you wouldn't read the Old, Christopher.

CHRIS. Eh ? Why not ?

MARTHA. It 's not charitable. God was so cruel in the Old Testament. It frightens me.

CHRIS. There was justice done in those days. When a man sinned he was punished. God sent his lightnings and destroyed. There 's a deal too much forgiveness about the New Testament. It seems a tempting of Providence to read it to some people.

MARTHA. Don't, Christopher, don't. Surely there 's forgiveness for all.

CHRIS. (*sternly*). Not for some.

(*There is a pause.* MARTHA *sits looking in the fire, and* CHRISTOPHER *finds the place in the Bible. He is seated behind the table.*)

(*Suddenly the door from the hall is quietly opened, and* MARY *sidles in unheard. She is an attractive-looking, dusky girl, with a rebellious mouth. Her dark hair sweeps down low over her temples. Her dress has been fine once, red and gold predominating*

*in it, but is now shabby. Over it she wears a loose black rain-cloak. A slight wrap is thrown over her head and shoulders. She looks haggard and timid. After a few seconds* CHRISTOPHER *feels he is being watched. He turns and sees* MARY. *He starts and rises slowly, stopping behind the table. They look at each other.*)

MARY (*appealingly*). Father! (*She makes a movement towards him. He puts up his hand and she stops.*)

MARTHA (*hearing the voice and rising*). Mary! My girl——

CHRIS. Stop where ye are, mother.

MARTHA. Mary, come to me. (*She staggers towards* MARY. CHRIS. *stops her.*)

CHRIS. Sit ye there. (*He places* MARTHA *in chair on the side of the table away from* MARY.)

CHRIS. (*to* MARY, *after a pause*). Well?

MARY. Father!

CHRIS. Ye 've come back.

MARY. Yes.

CHRIS. Are ye married?

MARY (*in a whisper*). No.

CHRIS. Why not?

MARY. He—he was married already.

CHRIS. When ye went away with him?

MARY. Yes.

CHRIS. And ye knew that?

MARY. Yes. (*A pause.* CHRIS. *bows his head and does not speak.*)

CHRIS. (*at length*). What have ye come back for?

MARY. Father!

CHRIS. Why didn't ye stay with him ?

MARY. He—he is dead.

CHRIS. Dead ! Well ?

MARY. So I 've—come back.

CHRIS. What for ?

MARY. To ask you to let me stay with you.

CHRIS. What right have ye to ask that ?

MARTHA. Oh—father——

CHRIS. (*to* MARTHA). Tchah ! (*To* MARY.) Well ?

MARY. I 'm still your daughter, father.

CHRIS. Hearken to me—and you, mother. Three years ago I had a daughter. She was a good girl, I thought. She 'd been brought up religious, and we were proud of her. (*He pauses and bends his head lower, supporting himself by resting his knuckles on the table before him. He looks down at the table.*) But we were wrong. She was bad underneath. Ay, right down wicked all through, in spite of her bringing-up. She 'd two good parents, and a young man that was fond of her. But she chose to leave them and go away with a man as she knew couldn't never marry her. (*He pauses again.*) She made that choice, and must take the consequences. I see no way out of it. Sin must have its punishment. She chose to leave her home, and that done—she leaves it for ever.

(MARTHA *gives a low cry, and buries her face in her hands on the table.* CHRIS. *places his hand on her head to comfort her.*)

CHRIS. Have ye anything to say ?

MARY. I wasn't that bad. He promised to marry me when his wife died ; she drank, and made his

life wretched. I loved him truly—he was very good to me. We 've been husband and wife in the sight of Heaven. Then—he died and left me alone.

CHRIS. Had ye any children ?

MARY. No.

CHRIS. For that, be thankful.

MARY. I was sorry to leave Edward like I did. But I didn't love him ; I didn't know what love was until I met—*him.* And living here was so dismal, with the chapel hanging over us all the time, and I felt I must make an effort and be free ; get away from it all and go with the one I loved.

CHRIS. Ah ! (*A pause.*) Have ye anything more to say ?

MARY. Only this. The money he left me is all done. I 've lived honestly, and I 've tried to get work. But I can't. I 'm not good at it, and besides, people seem to hesitate about engaging me.

CHRIS. Ah !

MARY. Don't send me away, father. Give me a chance, only one. I 've done no wrong perhaps in the sight of Heaven up to now, making *his* life happier. I 've been faithful to *him,* but—if you send me away now—I don't know what will happen to me. I may become altogether bad.

MARTHA. Father—mercy——

CHRIS. She made her choice to leave us three years ago.

MARTHA. Forgive her.

CHRIS. It 's not for me to forgive her. She must look higher than me for forgiveness.

MARTHA. But I can forgive her. You don't know how lonely I 've been these years, and how I 've longed for my child. Mary! (*She rises.*)

CHRIS. Stay where ye are. Don't touch her.

MARY. I see. I understand you, father. I came here to try to live a new life by your help—I knew you were a Christian. I thought you 'd help me. I thought you 'd be guided by that Book you have there.

MARTHA. It 's the Old Testament he goes by, Mary, the cruel part. I don't; I go by the New, and I forgive you as it tells me to——

CHRIS. Mother, don't speak like that. God knows it 's hard for me to do it, but I feel it 's so ordered, and I 've got to. Not but what there 's something in what you says about the New Testament. But I can't rightly decide: I 'm not a fit judge. I 'm too — too broad-minded. As a religious man I feel she 's accursed, and as a father I 'm casting about for an excuse to pardon her. But I can't rightly find it. I think he as should have been your husband has a right to speak in this.

MARY. Edward! Is he here? I can't face *him*.

(EDWARD *enters briskly, and seeing* MARY *stops dead.* MARY *sinks in chair by the door and hides her face.*)

MARTHA (*feverishly*). Edward, Edward, Mary 's come back as I 've prayed. Father does not know what to do; he thinks he ought to send her away, but I 'm begging him to forgive her. He can't tell what to do. Father, Edward will decide. Edward has always promised me to marry her

if she came back. He can forgive her—Edward 'll marry her, father. Will you be guided by him? You don't rightly know what to do, you say. Let him decide. Father! father! Let Edward decide. (*She sinks on her knees before* CHRISTOPHER.)

CHRIS. Edward has always promised to marry her! Have ye promised my wife that?

EDWARD (*helplessly*). Yes—yes—I have——

MARTHA. Yes—he has, always. Edward 's not so fond of the chapel; but he 's a better man than you, father.

CHRIS. Then I see my way clear. The judgment 's taken out of my hands. It 's in Edward's. If he 'll marry this girl notwithstanding her sin, then I take it as a sign that she may be forgiven. If not—she goes for ever from beneath my roof.

MARTHA. Mary, my girl, you 're saved! He 's told me many a time he 'd marry you.

CHRIS. Be silent, Martha. I don't ask my daughter's consent. That she 'll give, I take it, without question. (*He looks at her; she does not raise her head.* CHRIS. *turns to* EDWARD.) It 's for you to say.

EDWARD. You 're not leaving it to me, are you?

CHRIS. Yes.

EDWARD. But I 'd rather you didn't. Don't put it like that. Forgive the girl, Mr. Battersby, and then we 'll see.

CHRIS. It 's for you to decide. (*A pause.* EDWARD *stands half-dazed.*)

MARTHA. Edward!

CHRIS. Martha! Well, my lad?

(EDWARD *does not reply; he scratches his head.*)

CHRIS. Ah, I take it ye won't.

EDWARD. Oh, it 's not good enough putting it like this.

CHRIS. Ye won't?

EDWARD. I can't—I can't.

MARTHA. Ah! (*She gives a despairing cry.* CHRIS., *who has been anxiously awaiting* EDWARD'S *decision, sways and nearly breaks down. He regains control of himself.*)

CHRIS. Ah! He can't marry her. I don't ask reasons——

EDWARD. But I must—I must tell you why.

MARTHA. Oh! And he always promised me!

EDWARD. I know I did, and I meant it at first. But as time went on, I thought less of her, you see—Mary, I mean—and—and——

MARTHA. But he always promised me——

EDWARD. Ay, I did. I kept on promising you. I hadn't the heart to tell you I 'd changed. Every time I came you asked me, and I couldn't bear to tell you no; for I never thought Mary would come back.

CHRIS. Edward, think once again. It 's because she is what she is that you can't marry her?

EDWARD. No. It 's because I was married to a girl in Nottingham last week.

MARTHA. Ah, and he promised me——

EDWARD. You 'll not be guided by me, Mr. Battersby? I couldn't be expected to wait for ever.

CHRIS. Edward, I don't blame you. You 'd a right

to do as you thought best. That finishes it. With what happens now, you 've nothing to do.

EDWARD. I—I 'd best go, I think.

CHRIS. I think so.

EDWARD (*takes his coat from the chair by the fire*). I 'm sorry about this. (*He crosses to the door, and stops in front of* MARY. *She does not look at him. He opens the door.*) Well! Good night, all.

CHRIS. Edward. I 'd like to tell you that this will make no difference to my will. It 'll all go to you.

EDWARD. I 'd a good deal rather you left it to—to her.

CHRIS. Good night, Edward.

(EDWARD *goes out and shuts the door. Shortly afterwards the outer door closes. There is a long pause.*)

MARTHA (*in a whisper*). He always promised me——

CHRIS. That 's enough, mother. (*He turns and looks at* MARY.)

MARY. I 'm to go ? (CHRIS. *bows his head.*)

MARY. Very well, I 'll go. I came here repenting and wanting to be saved. I might have known you better. Mother 's right when she says you go by the Old Testament. Much good your religion will do you now. I don't envy you when you go to the chapel on Sunday and kneel and say, ' Forgive us our trespasses.' You must learn to forgive other people's before you ask for your own to be forgiven.

CHRIS. The judgment was taken out of my hands.

MARY. Yes, I 'll go. And what to do ? I don't care. I 'll not work ; I 'm not made for it. Why should I try and be good when I see what sort of people

religion makes? I 've enough money to take me back to London—to the London streets.

CHRIS. You 're going to damnation?

MARY. And if I am, it 's you as has sent me there.

CHRIS. (*tonelessly*). The judgment was taken out of my hands.

MARY. Good-bye, mother.

MARTHA (*rising*). Mary—my girl— Come back.

(MARY *opens the door.*)

MARTHA. Oh, I 've been so lonely. I want to kiss my girl before she goes. (*She moves towards* MARY.)

CHRIS. Keep back!

MARY. I 've a right to kiss her good-bye.

CHRIS. You shan't touch her. She is pure.

MARTHA. Mary! Mary! (CHRIS. *helps her to a chair by fire.*)

MARY. Good-bye, dear mother. (*She waves a kiss to* MARTHA.)

(MARY *goes out and closes the door.* CHRIS. *goes to table and sits.* MARTHA *has fainted in her chair.*)

CHRIS. (*with intense agony*). My child—my dear child! (*He bows his head on his arms. The outer door closes.*) (*Raising his head and controlling himself.*) We 'll just read that chapter together, mother, before we go to rest. The eighth chapter of St. John's Gospel.

*The* CURTAIN *falls.*

# THE DEAR DEPARTED

## CHARACTERS

MRS. SLATER
MRS. JORDAN } (*Sisters*).

HENRY SLATER
BEN JORDAN } (*their Husbands*).

VICTORIA SLATER (*a Girl of ten*).

ABEL MERRYWEATHER.

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*The action takes place in a provincial town on a Saturday afternoon.*

# THE DEAR DEPARTED

*The scene is the sitting-room of a small house in a lower middle-class district of a provincial town. On the spectator's left is the window, with the blinds down. A sofa is in front of it. On his right is a fireplace with an armchair by it. In the middle of the wall facing the spectator is the door into the passage. To the left of the door a cheap, shabby chest of drawers, to the right a sideboard. In the middle of the room is the table, with chairs round it. Ornaments and a cheap American clock are on the mantelpiece, in the hearth a kettle. By the sideboard a pair of gaudy new carpet slippers. The table is partly laid for tea, and the necessaries for the meal are on the sideboard, as also are copies of an evening paper and of* 'Tit-Bits' *and* 'Pearson's Weekly.' *Turning to the left through the door takes you to the front door: to the right, upstairs. In the passage a hat-stand is visible.*

*When the curtain rises* Mrs. Slater *is seen laying the table. She is a vigorous, plump, red-faced vulgar woman, prepared to do any amount of straight talking to get her own way. She is in black, but not in complete mourning. She listens a moment and then goes to the window, opens it, and calls into the street.*

Mrs. Slater (*sharply*). Victoria, Victoria! D' ye hear? Come in, will you?

(MRS. SLATER *closes window and puts the blind straight, and then returns to her work at the table.* VICTORIA, *a precocious girl of ten, dressed in colours, enters.*)

MRS. S. I 'm amazed at you, Victoria ; I really am. How you can be gallivanting about in the street with your grandfather lying dead and cold upstairs I don't know. Be off now, and change your dress before your Aunt Elizabeth and your Uncle Ben come. It would never do for them to find you in colours.

VICTORIA. What are they coming for ? They haven't been here for ages.

MRS. S. They 're coming to talk over poor grandpa's affairs. Your father sent them a telegram as soon as we found he was dead. (*A noise is heard.*) Good gracious, that 's never them ! (MRS. SLATER *hurries to the door and opens it.*) No, thank goodness ! it 's only your father.

(HENRY SLATER, *a stooping, heavy man, with a drooping moustache, enters. He is wearing a black tail coat, grey trousers, a black tie, and a bowler hat. He carries a little paper parcel.*)

HENRY. Not come yet, eh ?

MRS. S. You can see they haven't, can't you ? Now, Victoria, be off upstairs and that quick. Put your white frock on with a black sash. (VICTORIA *goes out.*)

MRS. S. (*to* HENRY). I 'm not satisfied, but it 's the best we can do till our new black 's ready, and Ben and Elizabeth will never have thought about mourning yet, so we 'll outshine them there.

(HENRY *sits in the armchair by the fire.*) Get your boots off, Henry; Elizabeth's that prying she notices the least speck of dirt.

HENRY. I'm wondering if they'll come at all. When you and Elizabeth quarrelled she said she'd never set foot in your house again.

MRS. S. She'll come fast enough after her share of what grandfather's left. You know how hard she can be when she likes. Where she gets it from I can't tell.

(MRS. SLATER *unwraps the parcel* HENRY *has brought. It contains sliced tongue, which she puts on a dish on the table.*)

HENRY. I suppose it's in the family.

MRS. S. What do you mean by that, Henry Slater?

HENRY. I was referring to your father, not to you. Where are my slippers?

MRS. S. In the kitchen; but you want a new pair, those old ones are nearly worn out. (*Nearly breaking down.*) You don't seem to realise what it's costing me to bear up like I am doing. My heart's fit to break when I see the little trifles that belonged to grandfather lying around, and think he'll never use them again. (*Briskly.*) Here! you'd better wear these slippers of grandfather's now. It's lucky he'd just got a new pair.

HENRY. They'll be very small for me, my dear.

MRS. S. They'll stretch, won't they? I'm not going to have them wasted. (*She has finished laying the table.*) Henry, I've been thinking about that bureau of grandfather's that's in

his bedroom. You know I always wanted to have it after he died.

HENRY. You must arrange with Elizabeth when you 're dividing things up.

MRS. S. Elizabeth 's that sharp she 'll see I 'm after it, and she 'll drive a hard bargain over it. Eh, what it is to have a low money-grubbing spirit!

HENRY. Perhaps she 's got her eye on the bureau as well.

MRS. S. She 's never been here since grandfather bought it. If it was only down here instead of in his room, she 'd never guess it wasn't our own.

HENRY (*startled*). Amelia! (*He rises.*)

MRS. S. Henry, why shouldn't we bring that bureau down here now? We could do it before they come.

HENRY (*stupefied*). I wouldn't care to.

MRS. S. Don't look so daft. Why not?

HENRY. It doesn't seem delicate, somehow.

MRS. S. We could put that shabby old chest of drawers upstairs where the bureau is now. Elizabeth could have that and welcome. I 've always wanted to get rid of it. (*She points to the drawers.*)

HENRY. Suppose they come when we 're doing it.

MRS. S. I 'll fasten the front door. Get your coat off, Henry; we 'll change it.

(MRS. SLATER *goes out to fasten the front door.* HENRY *takes his coat off.* MRS. SLATER *reappears.*)

MRS. S. I 'll run up and move the chairs out of the way.

(VICTORIA *appears, dressed according to her mother's instructions.*)

VIC. Will you fasten my frock up the back, mother ?

MRS. S. I 'm busy ; get your father to do it.

(MRS. SLATER *hurries upstairs, and* HENRY *fastens the frock.*)

VIC. What have you got your coat off for, father ?

HENRY. Mother and me is going to bring grandfather's bureau down here.

VIC. (*after a moment's thought*). Are we pinching it before Aunt Elizabeth comes ?

HENRY (*shocked*). No, my child. Grandpa gave it your mother before he died.

VIC. This morning ?

HENRY. Yes.

VIC. Ah ! He was drunk this morning.

HENRY. Hush ; you mustn't ever say he was drunk, now.

(HENRY *has fastened the frock, and* MRS. SLATER *appears carrying a handsome clock under her arm.*)

MRS. S. I thought I 'd fetch this down as well. (*She puts it on the mantelpiece.*) Our clock 's worth nothing, and this always appealed to me.

VIC. That 's grandpa's clock.

MRS. S. Chut ! Be quiet ! It 's ours now. Come, Henry, lift your end. Victoria, don't breathe a word to your aunt about the clock and the bureau.

(*They carry the chest of drawers through the doorway.*)

VIC. (*to herself*). I *thought* we 'd pinched them.

(*After a short pause there is a sharp knock at the front door.*)

MRS. S. (*from upstairs*). Victoria, if that 's your aunt and uncle you 're not to open the door.

(VICTORIA *peeps through the window.*)

VIC. Mother, it 's them !

MRS. S. You 're not to open the door till I come down. (*Knocking repeated.*) Let them knock away. (*There is a heavy bumping noise.*) Mind the wall, Henry.

(HENRY *and* MRS. SLATER, *very hot and flushed, stagger in with a pretty old-fashioned bureau containing a locked desk. They put it where the chest of drawers was, and straighten the ornaments, etc. The knocking is repeated.*)

MRS. S. That was a near thing. Open the door, Victoria. Now, Henry, get your coat on. (*She helps him.*)

HENRY. Did we knock much plaster off the wall ?

MRS. S. Never mind the plaster. Do I look all right ? (*Straightening her hair at the glass.*) Just watch Elizabeth's face when she sees we 're all in half mourning. (*Throwing him* 'Tit-Bits.') Take this and sit down. Try and look as if we 'd been waiting for them.

(HENRY *sits in the armchair and* MRS. SLATER *left of table. They read ostentatiously.* VICTORIA *ushers in* BEN *and* MRS. JORDAN. *The latter is a stout, complacent woman, with an impassive face and an irritating air of being always right. She is wearing a complete and deadly outfit of new mourning crowned by a great black hat with plumes.* BEN *is also in complete new mourning, with black gloves and a band round his hat.*

*He is rather a jolly little man, accustomed to be humorous, but at present trying to adapt himself to the regrettable occasion. He has a bright, chirpy little voice.* MRS. JORDAN *sails into the room, and solemnly goes straight to* MRS. SLATER *and kisses her. The men shake hands.* MRS. JORDAN *kisses* HENRY. BEN *kisses* MRS. SLATER. *Not a word is spoken.* MRS. SLATER *furtively inspects the new mourning.*)

MRS. JORDAN. Well, Amelia, and so he 's 'gone' at last.

MRS. S. Yes, he 's gone. He was seventy-two a fortnight last Sunday.

(*She sniffs back a tear.* MRS. JORDAN *sits on the left of the table.* MRS. SLATER *on the right.* HENRY *in the armchair.* BEN *on the sofa with* VICTORIA *near him.*)

BEN (*chirpily*). Now, Amelia, you mustn't give way. We 've all got to die some time or other. It might have been worse.

MRS. S. I don't see how.

BEN. It might have been one of us.

HENRY. It 's taken you a long time to get here, Elizabeth.

MRS. J. Oh, I couldn't do it! I really couldn't do it.

MRS. S. (*suspiciously*). Couldn't do what?

MRS. J. I couldn't start without getting the mourning. (*Glancing at her sister.*)

MRS. S. We 've ordered ours, you may be sure. (*Acidly.*) I never could fancy buying ready-made things.

Mrs. J. No ? For myself it 's such a relief to get into the black. And now perhaps you 'll tell us all about it. What did the doctor say ?

Mrs. S. Oh, he 's not been near yet.

Mrs. J. Not been near ?

Ben (*in the same breath*). Didn't you send for him at once ?

Mrs. S. Of course I did. Do you take me for a fool ? I sent Henry at once for Dr. Pringle, but he was out.

Ben. You should have gone for another. Eh, Eliza ?

Mrs. J. Oh yes. It 's a fatal mistake.

Mrs. S. Pringle attended him when he was alive, and Pringle shall attend him when he 's dead. That 's professional etiquette.

Ben. Well, you know your own business best, but——

Mrs. J. Yes—it 's a fatal mistake.

Mrs. S. Don't talk so silly, Elizabeth. What good could a doctor have done ?

Mrs. J. Look at the many cases of persons being restored to life hours after they were thought to be ' gone.'

Henry. That 's when they 've been drowned. Your father wasn't drowned, Elizabeth.

Ben (*humorously*). There wasn't much fear of that. If there was one thing he couldn't bear it was water.

(*He laughs, but no one else does.*)

Mrs. J. (*pained*). Ben ! (Ben *is crushed at once.*)

Mrs. S. (*piqued*). I 'm sure he washed regular enough.

Mrs. J. If he did take a drop too much at times, we 'll not dwell on that, now.

MRS. S. Father had been 'merry' this morning. He went out soon after breakfast to pay his insurance.

BEN. My word, it 's a good thing he did.

MRS. J. He always was thoughtful in that way. He was too honourable to have 'gone' without paying his premium.

MRS. S. Well, he must have gone round to the Ring-o'-Bells afterwards, for he came in as merry as a sandboy. I says, 'We 're only waiting Henry to start dinner.' 'Dinner,' he says, 'I don't want no dinner, I 'm going to bed!'

BEN (*shaking his head*). Ah! Dear, dear.

HENRY. And when I came in I found him undressed sure enough and snug in bed. (*He rises and stands on the hearthrug.*)

MRS. J. (*definitely*). Yes, he 'd had a 'warning.' I 'm sure of that. Did he know you?

HENRY. Yes. He spoke to me.

MRS. J. Did he say he 'd had a 'warning'?

HENRY. No. He said, 'Henry, would you mind taking my boots off? I forgot before I got into bed.'

MRS. J. He must have been wandering.

HENRY. No, he 'd got 'em on all right.

MRS. S. And when we 'd finished dinner I thought I 'd take up a bit of something on a tray. He was lying there for all the world as if he was asleep, so I put the tray down on the bureau—(*correcting herself*) on the chest of drawers—and went to waken him. (*A pause.*) He was quite cold.

HENRY. Then I heard Amelia calling for me, and I ran upstairs.

MRS. S. Of course we could do nothing.

MRS. J. He was ' gone ' ?

HENRY. There wasn't any doubt.

MRS. J. I always knew he 'd go sudden in the end.

(*A pause; they wipe their eyes and sniff back tears.*)

MRS. S. (*rising briskly at length; in a businesslike tone*). Well, will you go up and look at him now, or shall we have tea ?

MRS. J. What do you say, Ben ?

BEN. I 'm not particular.

MRS. J. (*surveying the table*). Well then, if the kettle 's nearly ready we may as well have tea first.

(MRS. SLATER *puts the kettle on the fire and gets tea ready.*)

HENRY. One thing we may as well decide now : the announcement in the papers.

MRS. J. I was thinking of that. What would you put ?

MRS. S. At the residence of his daughter, 235 Upper Cornbank Street, etc.

HENRY. You wouldn't care for a bit of poetry ?

MRS. J. I like ' Never Forgotten.' It 's refined.

HENRY. Yes, but it 's rather soon for that.

BEN. You couldn't very well have forgot him the day after.

MRS. S. I always fancy ' A loving husband, a kind father, and a faithful friend.'

BEN (*doubtfully*). Do you think that 's right ?

HENRY. I don't think it matters whether it 's right or not.

MRS. J. No, it 's more for the look of the thing.

HENRY. I saw a verse in the *Evening News* yester-

day. Proper poetry it was. It rhymed. (*He gets the paper and reads*):

'Despised and forgotten by some you may be,
But the spot that contains you is sacred to we.'

MRS. J. That 'll never do. You don't say 'Sacred to we.'

HENRY. It 's in the paper.

MRS. S. You wouldn't say it if you were speaking properly, but it 's different in poetry.

HENRY. Poetic licence, you know.

MRS. J. No, that 'll never do. We want a verse that says how much we loved him, and refers to all his good qualities, and says what a heavy loss we 've had.

MRS. S. You want a whole poem. That 'll cost a good lot.

MRS. J. Well, we 'll think about it after tea, and then we 'll look through his bits of things and make a list of them. There 's all the furniture in his room.

HENRY. There 's no jewellery or valuables of that sort.

MRS. J. Except his gold watch. He promised that to our Jimmy.

MRS. S. Promised your Jimmy! I never heard of that.

MRS. J. Oh, but he did, Amelia, when he was living with us. He was very fond of Jimmy.

MRS. S. Well. (*Amazed.*) I don't know!

BEN. Anyhow, there 's his insurance money. Have you got the receipt for the premium he paid this morning?

Mrs. S. I 've not seen it.

(Victoria *jumps up from the sofa and comes behind the table.*)

Vic. Mother, I don't think grandpa went to pay his insurance this morning.

Mrs. S. He went out.

Vic. Yes, but he didn't go into the town. He met old Mr. Tattersall down the street, and they went off past St. Philips's Church.

Mrs. S. To the Ring-o'-Bells, I 'll be bound.

Ben. The Ring-o'-Bells ?

Mrs. S. That public-house that John Shorrocks' widow keeps. He is always hanging about there. Oh, if he hasn't paid it——

Ben. Do you think he hasn't paid it ? Was it overdue ?

Mrs. S. I should think it was overdue.

Mrs. J. Something tells me he 's not paid it. I 've a ' warning,' I know it ; he 's not paid it.

Ben. The drunken old beggar.

Mrs. J. He 's done it on purpose, just to annoy us.

Mrs. S. After all I 've done for him, having to put up with him in the house these three years. It 's nothing short of swindling.

Mrs. J. I had to put up with him for five years.

Mrs. S. And you were trying to turn him over to us all the time.

Henry. But we don't know for certain that he 's not paid the premium.

Mrs. J. I do. It 's come over me all at once that he hasn't.

Mrs. S. Victoria, run upstairs and fetch that bunch of keys that 's on your grandpa's dressing-table.

VIC. (*timidly*). In grandpa's room ?

MRS. S. Yes.

VIC. I—I don't like to.

MRS. S. Don't talk so silly. There 's no one can hurt you.

(VICTORIA *goes out reluctantly.*)

We 'll see if he 's locked the receipt up in the bureau.

BEN. In where ? In this thing ? (*He rises and examines it.*)

MRS. J. (*also rising*). Where did you pick that up, Amelia ? It 's new since last I was here.

(*They examine it closely.*)

MRS. S. Oh—Henry picked it up one day.

MRS. J. I like it. It 's artistic. Did you buy it at an auction ?

HENRY. Eh ? Where did I buy it, Amelia ?

MRS. S. Yes, at an auction.

BEN (*disparagingly*). Oh, second-hand ?

MRS. J. Don't show your ignorance, Ben. All artistic things are second-hand. Look at those old masters.

(VICTORIA *returns, very scared. She closes the door after her.*)

VIC. Mother ! Mother !

MRS. S. What is it, child ?

VIC. Grandpa 's getting up.

BEN. What ?

MRS. S. What do you say ?

VIC. Grandpa 's getting up.

MRS. J. The child 's crazy.

MRS. S. Don't talk so silly. Don't you know your grandpa 's dead ?

VIC. No, no ; he 's getting up. I saw him.

(*They are transfixed with amazement ;* BEN *and* MRS. JORDAN *left of table ;* VICTORIA *clings to* MRS. SLATER, *right of table ;* HENRY *near fireplace.*)

MRS. J. You 'd better go up and see for yourself, Amelia.

MRS. S. Here—come with me, Henry.

(HENRY *draws back terrified.*)

BEN (*suddenly*). Hist ! Listen.

(*They look at the door. A slight chuckling is heard outside. The door opens, revealing an old man clad in a faded but gay dressing-gown. He is in his stockinged feet. Although over seventy he is vigorous and well coloured ; his bright, malicious eyes twinkle under his heavy, reddish-grey eyebrows. He is obviously either grandfather* ABEL MERRYWEATHER *or else his ghost.*)

ABEL. What 's the matter with little Vicky ? (*He sees* BEN *and* MRS. JORDAN.) Hello ! What brings you here ? How 's yourself, Ben ?

(ABEL *thrusts his hand at* BEN, *who skips back smartly and retreats with* MRS. JORDAN *to a safe distance below the sofa.*)

MRS. S. (*approaching* ABEL *gingerly*). Grandfather, is that you ? (*She pokes him with her hand to see if he is solid.*)

ABEL. Of course it 's me. Don't do that, 'Melia. What the devil do you mean by this tomfoolery ?

MRS. S. (*to the others*). He 's not dead.

BEN. Doesn't seem like it.

ABEL (*irritated by the whispering*). You 've kept

away long enough, Lizzie ; and now you 've come you don't seem over-pleased to see me.

Mrs. J. You took us by surprise, father. Are you keeping quite well ?

Abel (*trying to catch the words*). Eh ? What ?

Mrs. J. Are you quite well ?

Abel. Ay, I 'm right enough but for a bit of a headache. I wouldn't mind betting that I 'm not the first in this house to be carried to the cemetery. I always think Henry there looks none too healthy.

Mrs. J. Well I never ! (Abel *crosses to the armchair, and* Henry *gets out of his way to the front of the table.*)

Abel. 'Melia, what the dickens did I do with my new slippers ?

Mrs. S. (*confused*). Aren't they by the hearth, grandfather ?

Abel. I don't see them. (*Observing* Henry *trying to remove the slippers.*) Why, you 've got 'em on, Henry.

Mrs. S. (*promptly*). I told him to put them on to stretch them, they were that new and hard. Now, Henry.

(Mrs. Slater *snatches the slippers from* Henry *and gives them to* Abel, *who puts them on and sits in armchair.*)

Mrs. J. (*to* Ben). Well, I don't call that delicate, stepping into a dead man's shoes in such haste.

(Henry *goes up to the window and pulls up the blind.* Victoria *runs across to* Abel *and sits on the floor at his feet.*)

Vic. Oh, grandpa, I 'm so glad you 're not dead.

MRS. S. (*in a vindictive whisper*). Hold your tongue, Victoria.

ABEL. Eh ? What 's that ? Who 's gone dead ?

MRS. S. (*loudly*). Victoria says she 's sorry about your head.

ABEL. Ah, thank you, Vicky, but I 'm feeling better.

MRS. S. (*to* MRS. J.). He 's so fond of Victoria.

MRS. J. (*to* MRS. S.). Yes ; he 's fond of our Jimmy, too.

MRS. S. You 'd better ask him if he promised your Jimmy his gold watch.

MRS. J. (*disconcerted*). I couldn't just now. I don't feel equal to it.

ABEL. Why, Ben, you 're in mourning ! And Lizzie too. And 'Melia, and Henry, and little Vicky ! Who 's gone dead ? It 's some one in the family. (*He chuckles.*)

MRS. S. No one you know, father. A relation of Ben's.

ABEL. And what relation of Ben's ?

MRS. S. His brother.

BEN (*to* MRS. S.). Dang it, I never had one !

ABEL. Dear, dear. And what was his name, Ben ?

BEN (*at a loss*). Er—er. (*He crosses to front of table.*)

MRS. S. (R. *of table, prompting*). Frederick.

MRS. J. (L. *of table, prompting*). Albert.

BEN. Er—Fred—Alb—Isaac.

ABEL. Isaac ? And where did your brother Isaac die ?

BEN. In—er—in Australia.

ABEL. Dear, dear. He 'd be older than you, eh ?

BEN. Yes, five year.

ABEL. Ay, ay. Are you going to the funeral ?

BEN. Oh yes.

MRS. S. *and* MRS. J. No, no.

BEN. No, of course not. (*He retires to the left.*)

ABEL (*rising*). Well, I suppose you 've only been waiting for me to begin tea. I 'm feeling hungry.

MRS. S. (*taking up the kettle*). I 'll make tea.

ABEL. Come along, now ; sit you down and let 's be jolly.

(ABEL *sits at the head of the table, facing spectator.* BEN *and* MRS. JORDAN *on the left.* VICTORIA *brings a chair and sits by* ABEL. MRS. SLATER *and* HENRY *sit on the right. Both the women are next to* ABEL.)

MRS. S. Henry, give grandpa some tongue.

ABEL. Thank you. I 'll make a start. (*He helps himself to bread and butter.*)

(HENRY *serves the tongue and* MRS. SLATER *pours out tea. Only* ABEL *eats with any heartiness.*)

BEN. Glad to see you 've got an appetite, Mr. Merryweather, although you 've not been so well.

ABEL. Nothing serious. I 've been lying down for a bit.

MRS. S. Been to sleep, grandfather ?

ABEL. No, I 've not been to sleep.

MRS. S. *and* HENRY. Oh !

ABEL (*eating and drinking*). I can't exactly call everything to mind, but I remember I was a bit dazed, like. I couldn't move an inch, hand or foot.

BEN. And could you see and hear, Mr. Merryweather ?

ABEL. Yes, but I don't remember seeing anything

particular. Mustard, Ben. (BEN *passes the mustard.*)

MRS. S. Of course not, grandfather. It was all your fancy. You must have been asleep.

ABEL (*snappishly*). I tell you I wasn't asleep, 'Melia. Damn it, I ought to know!

MRS. J. Didn't you see Henry or Amelia come into the room?

ABEL (*scratching his head*). Now let me think——

MRS. S. I wouldn't press him, Elizabeth. Don't press him.

HENRY. No. I wouldn't worry him.

ABEL (*suddenly recollecting*). Ay, begad! 'Melia and Henry, what the devil did you mean by shifting my bureau out of my bedroom?

(HENRY *and* MRS. SLATER *are speechless.*)

D' you hear me? Henry! 'Melia!

MRS. J. What bureau was that, father?

ABEL. Why, my bureau, the one I bought——

MRS. J. (*pointing to the bureau*). Was it that one, father?

ABEL. Ah, that 's it. What 's it doing here? Eh?

(*A pause. The clock on the mantelpiece strikes six. Every one looks at it.*)

Drat me if that isn't my clock, too. What the devil 's been going on in this house?

(*A slight pause.*)

BEN. Well, I 'll be hanged.

MRS. J. (*rising*). I 'll tell you what 's been going on in this house, father. Nothing short of robbery.

MRS. S. Be quiet, Elizabeth.

MRS. J. I 'll not be quiet. Oh, I call it double-faced.

HENRY. Now, now, Elizabeth.

MRS. J. And you, too. Are you such a poor creature that you must do every dirty thing she tells you ?

MRS. S. (*rising*). Remember where you are, Elizabeth.

HENRY (*rising*). Come, come. No quarrelling.

BEN (*rising*). My wife 's every right to speak her own mind.

MRS. S. Then she can speak it outside, not here.

ABEL (*rising*). (*Thumping the table.*) Damn it all, will some one tell me what 's been going on ?

MRS. J. Yes, I will. I 'll not see you robbed.

ABEL. Who 's been robbing me ?

MRS. J. Amelia and Henry. They 've stolen your clock and bureau. (*Working herself up.*) They sneaked into your room like a thief in the night, and stole them after you were dead.

HENRY *and* MRS. S. Hush ! Quiet, Elizabeth !

MRS. J. I 'll not be stopped. After you were dead, I say.

ABEL. After who was dead ?

MRS. J. You.

ABEL. But I 'm not dead.

MRS. J. No, but they thought you were.

(*A pause.* ABEL *gazes round at them.*)

ABEL. Oho ! So that 's why you 're all in black to-day. You thought I was dead. (*He chuckles.*) That was a big mistake. (*He sits and resumes his tea.*)

MRS. S. (*sobbing*). Grandfather.

ABEL. It didn't take you long to start dividing my things between you.

MRS. J. No, father, you mustn't think that ; Amelia

was simply getting hold of them on her own account.

ABEL. You always were a keen one, Amelia. I suppose you thought the will wasn't fair.

HENRY. Did you make a will ?

ABEL. Yes, it was locked up in the bureau.

MRS. J. And what was in it, father ?

ABEL. That doesn't matter now. I 'm thinking of destroying it and making another.

MRS. S. (*sobbing*). Grandfather, you 'll not be hard on me.

ABEL. I 'll trouble you for another cup of tea, 'Melia ; two lumps and plenty of milk.

MRS. S. With pleasure, grandfather. (*She pours out the tea.*)

ABEL. I don't want to be hard on any one. I 'll tell you what I 'm going to do. Since your mother died, I 've lived part of the time with you, 'Melia, and part with you, Lizzie. Well, I shall make a new will, leaving all my bits of things to whoever I 'm living with when I die. How does that strike you ?

HENRY. It 's a bit of a lottery, like.

MRS. J. And who do you intend to live with from now ?

ABEL (*drinking his tea*). I 'm just coming to that.

MRS. J. You know, father, it 's quite time you came to live with us again. We 'd make you very comfortable.

MRS. S. No, he 's not been with us as long as he was with you.

MRS. J. I may be wrong, but I don't think father will fancy living on with you after what 's happened to-day.

ABEL. So you 'd like to have me again, Lizzie ?

MRS. J. You know we 're ready for you to make your home with us for as long as you please.

ABEL. What do you say to that, 'Melia ?

MRS. S. All I can say is that Elizabeth 's changed her mind in the last two years. (*Rising.*) Grandfather, do you know what the quarrel between us was about ?

MRS. J. Amelia, don't be a fool ; sit down.

MRS. S. No, if I 'm not to have him, you shan't either. We quarrelled because Elizabeth said she wouldn't take you off our hands at any price. She said she 'd had enough of you to last a lifetime, and we 'd got to keep you.

ABEL. It seems to me that neither of you has any cause to feel proud about the way you 've treated me.

MRS. S. If I 've done anything wrong, I 'm sure I 'm sorry for it.

MRS. J. And I can't say more than that, too.

ABEL. It 's a bit late to say it, now. You neither of you cared to put up with me.

MRS. S. *and* MRS. J. No, no, grandfather.

ABEL. Ay, you both say that because of what I 've told you about leaving my money. Well, since you don't want me I 'll go to some one that does.

BEN. Come, Mr. Merryweather, you 've got to live with one of your daughters.

ABEL. I 'll tell you what I 've got to do. On Monday next I 've got to do three things. I 've got to go to the lawyer's and alter my will ; and I 've got to go to the insurance office and pay my

premium; and I 've got to go to St. Philips's Chureh and get married.

BEN *and* HENRY. What!

MRS. J. Get married!

MRS. S. He 's out of his senses.

(*General consternation.*)

ABEL. I say I 'm going to get married.

MRS. S. Who to?

ABEL. To Mrs. John Shorrocks who keeps the Ring-o'-Bells. We 've had it fixed up a good while now, but I was keeping it for a pleasant surprise. (*He rises.*) I felt I was a bit of a burden to you, so I found some one who 'd think it a pleasure to look after me. We shall be very glad to see you at the eeremony. (*He gets to the door.*) Till Monday, then. Twelve o'eloek at St. Philips's Church. (*Opening the door.*) It 's a good thing you brought that bureau downstairs, 'Melia. It 'll be handier to earry across to the Ring-o'-Bells on Monday.

(*He goes out.*)

*The* CURTAIN *falls.*

# THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE

## CHARACTERS

Mr. Ovens.

Fred Ovens (*his Son*).

Mrs. Ovens (*his Second Wife*).

Edie (Mrs. Ovens' *Sister*).

Dr. Jellicoe.

Mr. Skrimshire (*a Solicitor*).

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*The scene is the parlour in the house of* Mr. Ovens.

# THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE

*The scene is triangular, only two walls of* Mr. Ovens' *parlour being visible. The left-hand wall is the longer. A window with a dark blind is near the spectator, and farther away is the fireplace. In the right-hand wall is the door, leading into a hall or passage. By the hearth, with its back to the spectator, is an armchair; it would be full in the light from the window if the blind were up and the sun were shining into the room. In the middle of the room is a big round table and three chairs. A sideboard is below the door; and a bureau, a sofa, and other chairs are in the room.*

*The place is comfortable, the room of a hard-headed peasant come to town and fairly successful there; of a man who without any advantages of birth or assistance of friends has carved out his two or three hundred a year competence for his old age, by severe economy and lucky speculation in small things.*

*It is an autumn evening. The fire is low, and the incandescent gas-burner by the hearth is lighted.*

Mr. Ovens *is sitting in the armchair with his back to the spectator. His face is not visible, but one can see his whitish grey hair and his bent back.* Edie *and* Mrs. Ovens *are sitting on opposite sides of the table, finishing a supper of bread and cheese and coffee.* Mrs. Ovens *is a hard, vigorous, capable woman of*

*thirty-five;* EDIE *a rather pleasant girl of twenty-three.*

EDIE. Won't *he* have any supper? (*Nodding at* MR. OVENS.)

MRS. OVENS. He? (*Jerking her head towards* MR. OVENS.) No; he had his bread and milk at six o'clock. I shan't give him any more before he goes to bed.

EDIE (*glancing at clock*). It 's half-past eight now.

MRS. O. He doesn't eat much. Slops and things of that sort. I have to feed him like a baby; he makes such a mess of his clothes if I don't. (*Looking into the coffee-jug.*) Will you have a drop more coffee? There 's only enough for one.

EDIE. No, I don't care about it.

MRS. O. Then I 'll finish it. (*She pours out the coffee.*) I 'd have fancied an onion with my cheese to-night, but Mr. Skrimshire's coming in to see *him* (*jerking her head backwards at* MR. OVENS), and they make your breath smell so.

EDIE. Mr. Skrimshire; he 's the solicitor that lives up at Bank Top?

MRS. O. Yes. *He* (*jerk of head*) used to take all his bits of business to Skrimshire's office in Salchester; and since he 's so ill now, and can't get up to town, young Mr. Skrimshire said he 'd look in and see him to-night.

EDIE. What does he want to see Mr. Skrimshire for?

MRS. O. (*smiling mysteriously*). Ah, aha!

EDIE. Can *he* hear us?

MRS. O. Hear us? No fear. He 's so deaf that he 'd

sit there as quiet as a mouse if the world was coming to an end and the last trump sounding.

EDIE (*coaxing*). Then tell me.

MRS. O. (*with a backward jerk*). He 's going to alter his will, at last.

EDIE. My word ! Going to cut Fred out ?

MRS. O. (*compressing her lips*). That I can't say.

EDIE. Is he going to leave everything to you ?

MRS. O. Nor that either. But if he did, wouldn't I have deserved it ?

EDIE. He 's been a lot of trouble to you these five years.

MRS. O. Trouble ! You may well say that. Let alone my marrying him when I was only thirty, and I might easy have found some young fellow who 'd have been glad to ask me.

EDIE. I said at the time you were daft, and he a widower with a son older than yourself.

MRS. O. He was sixty-six when I married him ; he 's seventy-one now. He 'll not last much longer, and I 'm only thirty-five.

EDIE. I never thought to see him pull through that last attack. It 's to be hoped he doesn't linger.

MRS. O. No, it would be a mercy if he were taken quickly. A mercy for him, I mean.

EDIE. And for you, too, if it comes to that.

MRS. O. You 'd never believe the work I have with him. Dressing him, and undressing him, and getting him up and down the stairs. He won't stop in his bedroom out of the way ; must be down here in his armchair. I could shake him sometimes, he 's that stupid.

(*There 's a knock at the front door.*)

MRS. O. Go and see who it is, Edie. It 's too early for Mr. Skrimshire yet, surely. Perhaps it 's the doctor; he 's not been to-day.

(EDIE *goes out.* MRS. OVENS *rises and goes to hearth.*)

(*To* MR. OVENS, *loudly.*) Are you quite warm enough? (MR. OVENS *does not reply.*) You 'll have to wake up when Mr. Skrimshire comes. (*Grumbling to herself.*) I don't know why you can't stop in bed; you do nothing but sleep down here.

(EDIE *runs in rather scared.*)

EDIE. Annie, it 's Fred!

MRS. O. Fred?

EDIE. Fred Ovens. His son!

MRS. O. What does he want?

(FRED OVENS *follows* EDIE *into the room. He is a tall, well-built, heavy man of thirty-six. He is awkward and sullen, almost brutish; but also rather a striking, handsome man in a clumsy way. He has a moustache, and wears rough country clothes, very shabby but almost picturesque. A coloured muffler is round his neck, and he carries a cap.*)

FRED. That 's a fine way to welcome a fellow when he comes home.

MRS. O. This isn't your home.

FRED. I want to have a word with you, Annie. You 'll excuse me calling you Annie; I never could bring myself to call you mother.

MRS. O. You can call me what you please so long as you take yourself away from here.

FRED (*seeing* MR. OVENS). Ay; there he is.

MRS. O. He doesn't want to see you.

FRED. I reckon I don't want to see him, either. Last time I came he banged the front door in my face.

MRS. O. Small wonder, either, seeing you came straight from gaol, without even waiting for your hair to grow. He told you never to let him see you again.

FRED. You 're as fond of me as ever, Annie.

MRS. O. Now look here, Fred Ovens. I 'm boss here. If you don't get out of this house in two minutes I 'll send Edie for the police.

FRED. Damn it; you 'll give me something to eat.

MRS. O. I will not.

FRED. I 'm starving. I've not eaten a bit since yesterday.

MRS. O. That 's no affair of mine.

EDIE. Give him something to eat, Annie.

MRS. O. No.

EDIE. He 's hungry. He 'll go away quiet after. (MRS. OVENS *hesitates.*) There 's some bread and cheese here. Do, now.

MRS. O. (*relenting*). You can have a bite of bread and cheese.

FRED (*sarcastically polite*). Thank you, Annie.

EDIE. Can I get him some beer ?

MRS. O. (*grudgingly*). If you like.

FRED. That 's good of you, Edie. I always knew my old father chose the wrong one when he married Annie.

(EDIE *goes out for the beer.* FRED *sits in the chair on the right of the table.*)

MRS. O. (*sitting on the left of the table*). Mind, you get outside this house as soon as you 've finished.

FRED (*eating*). You talk to me so like my father that I think I 'll have to call you 'mother' in future.

MRS. O. Don't let me have any of your lip. And just keep quiet or you 'll wake your father, and then there 'll be a fine row. He 'd never forgive me for letting you come in here.

(EDIE *returns with a jug of beer and a glass.*)

FRED. Thank you, my dear. (*He pours out beer.*) Good health, father. (*He drinks.*) I hear *he 's* not been so well lately.

MRS. O. He 's never been the same since you came and told him you 'd been in gaol, and he turned you out. He had a stroke that night.

FRED. Ah !

MRS. O. We thought his mind was clean broken down for a time. He couldn't speak properly, or attend to his business. Indeed, he 's only just getting right again now.

FRED. It 's lucky he 's got such a good, kind wife to look after him.

MRS. O. Be sharp with that, now, and clear out. (*She rises.*)

FRED. Before I clear out there 's something else I want you to do for me.

MRS. O. What 's that ?

(FRED *smiles.*)

You 'll get nothing else, I promise you.

FRED. You 'll give me some money, won't you ?

MRS. O. Not a penny.

FRED. Come—mother.

MRS. O. Not a penny, I say. We 've no money to give away here.

FRED. Lend me some, then.

MRS. O. Lend *you* !

FRED. I 'll pay you back.

MRS. O. *You 'll* never be able to pay anything back.

FRED. Some time. When *he 's* gone. (*Nodding at* MR. OVENS.)

MRS. O. (*grimly smiling*). I don't think so.

(FRED *looks at her in silence, and pushes his plate away.*)

FRED. What ? Has he cut me off, then ?

MRS. O. What do you deserve ?

FRED. Isn't he going to leave me anything ?

MRS. O. I don't know what he 's done.

FRED (*angrily*). Has he altered his will ? (*He rises.*)

MRS. O. (*alarmed*). Sit down. No, he 's not altered his will.

FRED (*relieved, and sitting down again*). Ah ! Then there *will* be something. He divided it all between you and me ; the money and the houses.

MRS. O. I believe he did.

FRED. Now look here. (*He leans back in his chair and pulls out his empty trousers' pockets.*) That 's all I 've got in the world. If you 'll lend me ten quid I 'll not trouble you again for a long time.

MRS. O. Why don't you *earn* your living ?

FRED. I 've tried.

MRS. O. Tried, indeed ! You don't want to work.

FRED. It 's not so easy to get work as you may think.

MRS. O. Where have you been trying ?

FRED. In Salchester.

MRS. O. You 've been at those meetings of the unemployed ?

FRED. Yes, I 've done a deal of talking at them.

MRS. O. I thought so ; that 's about all you 're fit for. Have you done now ?

FRED (*leaning back in his chair*). Ay, I 've done.

MRS. O. Then you 'd better be going.

FRED. You 're mighty free with your tongue, mother. Suppose I said I wouldn't go ?

MRS. O. I 'd have you turned out. I 'm master in this house.

FRED (*nodding to* MR. OVENS). What about *him* ? I thought he was master.

MRS. O. You thought wrong then. But you can wake him up if you like and see what he 'll say.

FRED. No, I know what he 'll say. (*Rising and walking round to* MR. OVENS.) Yes ; you 've been a good father to me.

MRS. O. You 've been a good son to him, haven't you ?

FRED (*not heeding her*). You turned me out of doors when I needed helping ; you hate me. Well, I don't love you, neither.

MRS. O. Are you going ?

FRED. I 'm going. (*He moves towards the door.*) Give me some money.

MRS. O. Not a farthing.

(*There is a knock at the front door.* EDIE *goes out.*)

MRS. O. Drat it, there 's Mr. Skrimshire, and me not ready for him. That 's your fault.

FRED. Well, I 'm going, aren't I ? Who 's this coming ?

MRS. O. Some one to see your father on business.

(EDIE *reappears.*)

EDIE. Mr. Skrimshire 's come, Annie.

(MR. SKRIMSHIRE, *a very smartly-dressed young fellow of about twenty-seven, comes in briskly. He is the son and junior partner of old* SKRIMSHIRE, MR. OVENS' *solicitor.*)

MR. SKRIMSHIRE. Good evening, Mrs. Ovens.

MRS. O. Good evening, Mr. Skrimshire.

MR. S. My father 's getting on, you know, and he doesn't like turning out again after he gets home from town ; and since Mr. Ovens is too ill to come to the office, my father thought he wouldn't mind giving *me* his instructions.

MRS. O. Oh, certainly, Mr. Skrimshire. I 'll make room for you here. (*She moves the things from a corner of the table, and puts a chair for* MR. SKRIMSHIRE *facing the spectator.*)

MR. S. (*looking at* MR. OVENS). The old gentleman 's having a doze, I see. Pity to waken him up. (*He sits.*) Thank you.

MRS. O. It 'll do him good. He 's dozing all day long. (*To* FRED, *who is near the door.*) What are you waiting for ?

MR. S. (*turning round*). Hello ; you 're Fred Ovens, aren't you ?

FRED. Yes, sir.

MR. S. I 've not seen you about the village for a good while. Have you been away ?

FRED. Yes.

MR. S. What are you doing now ?

FRED. I 'm not doing anything just now, sir.

MR. S. Ah, out of work, eh ? I 'm sorry.

FRED. Have you come here to cut me out of his will ? (*Nodding at* MR. OVENS.)

MR. S. Have I come here to—my dear man, what are you talking about ?

FRED. You 've come to alter his will.

MR. S. (*shrugging his shoulders and raising his eyebrows at* MRS. OVENS). Mrs. Ovens, er—your husband wants to see me alone, doesn't he ?

FRED (*to* MRS. OVENS). Tell me if he 's come to alter my father's will.

MRS. O. Yes, he has.

MR. S. (*protesting*). Really !

FRED. Is he going to cut me out ? (*To* MR. SKRIMSHIRE.) Are you going to cut me out ?

MR. S. Don't make a fool of yourself, Ovens. Since Mrs. Ovens has told you, I don't mind saying that I 've come here to take your father's instructions for a fresh will. He may be going to cut you out, as you call it, for all I know. On the other hand, he may be going to leave you everything ; or again, he may be going to leave everything to the Archbishop of Canterbury. I haven't the least idea what he 's going to do, and if I had I shouldn't tell you.

FRED (*going up to* MR. OVENS). You old devil ; you 're going to cut me out, are you ? (*He shakes his fist at him.*) Curse you !

MRS. O. (*seizing* FRED). You leave him alone.

MR. S. (*rising*). Mrs. Ovens, unless I can see your husband alone it is really no use my wasting my time here. (*He replaces some papers in his pocket.*)

(*There is a knock at the front door.* EDIE *runs out.*)

FRED (*turning to* MR. SKRIMSHIRE). All right, Mr.

Skrimshire, you don't need to disturb yourself. I 'm going.

Mr. S. That 's right, Ovens. I 'm glad you 're not going to be stupid. Look here ; come and see me at the office some day next week, and I 'll see if I can find you a job.

Fred. That 's good of you. Why do you make an offer like that to me ?

Mr. S. You may be a client of ours some day.

(Edie *shows in* Dr. Jellicoe, *a jolly, stout medical man of about forty.*)

Dr. Jellicoe. Good evening, Mrs. Ovens. (*He looks at* Fred, *but doesn't know him. He speaks to* Mr. Skrimshire.) Hello, Jimmy, what are you doing here ? (*Without waiting for an answer.*) I 'm disgraceefully late, aren't I ? I was called away to Wraysford to young Mrs. Amore. An urgent case, but it turned out all right, I 'm happy to say. A fine boy. That 's why I 'm so late. Can't be helped. These things happen in the best regulated families, don't they ?

Mrs. O. Well, doctor, where should we be if they didn't ?

Dr. J. Quite so, quite so. And how 's the patient ?

Mrs. O. Not been so well to-day, doctor.

Dr. J. Asleep, I see. I 'll just have a look at him. Won't keep you a minute, Skrimshire.

Mr. S. Don't hurry on my account, old chap.

(Dr. Jellicoe *walks round in front of the table, and approaches* Mr. Ovens *from the back.*)

Dr. J. (*very loudly*). Good evening, Mr. Ovens. (*He taps his shoulder gently*). Wake up, sir, and let me have a look at you.

(Dr. Jellicoe *takes another step and turns, facing the spectator, to look* Mr. Ovens *in the face. Hardly has he glanced at* Mr. Ovens *than his own face changes in an instant, and assumes an expression of horror and surprise. He starts back.*)

Dr. J. (*in a very different tone*). How long has he been like this ?

(*They are all startled by the doctor's tone.*)

Mrs. O. Like—like what, doctor ?

(*Without replying,* Dr. Jellicoe *takes* Mr. Ovens' *wrist, feels the pulse, and lets the hand drop again on the knee. He places his hand on the heart. Then he straightens up and looks at the others.*)

Mrs. O. Doctor, what is it ?

Dr. J. (*quietly*). Mr. Ovens is dead.

(*They all stare at the doctor, spellbound.*)

Fred (*in a low, deep voice*). Dead !

Mr. S. (*in a whisper*). Good gracious !

(*A slight pause.* Mrs. Ovens *gives a low wail, and sinking into the chair left of the table breaks into a painful storm of sobs. She quickly subsides into a gentler subdued weeping, with her head buried in her arms.* Edie *comforts her.* Fred *sits down on a chair near the door, stunned.* Mr. Skrimshire *gently crosses and looks at* Mr. Ovens, *and stands by the doctor.*)

Mr. S. This is really an awful business, Jellicoe.

Dr. J. He must have been dead two or three hours.

Mr. S. Really ! What an extraordinary thing. Will there have to be an inquest ?

DR. J. No, I 've been attending him. I expected something of the sort would happen.

MR. S. It 's a bit of a shock, all the same. It 's made me feel quite queer.

DR. J. I suppose you 've nothing more to do here, now ?

MR. S. No ; at least, I 'd better have a word with young Ovens, and see if there 's anything I can do.

DR. J. I 've one more call to make. (*Looking at his watch.*) Come round and have a bit of supper and a game of billiards when you 've finished here.

MR. S. I will. Thanks very much.

(MR. SKRIMSHIRE *returns to the table and studies some papers.*)

DR. J. (*touching* MRS. OVENS *on the shoulder*). Come, come, you mustn't give way like this. We 've been expecting it, you know; we 've been expecting it.

MRS. O. (*tearfully*). Yes.

DR. J. I should get him on to a couch, or a bed, or something like that, so that all the necessary arrangements can be made. Er — you know whom to send for ?

MRS. O. (*shaking her head*). No.

DR. J. I 'll leave an address. A very decent woman.

(*He writes an address on the back of an envelope, and puts it on the table.*)

MRS. O. (*looking round at the figure of* MR. OVENS). Edie, get something — something to put over him.

(EDIE *goes out.*)

DR. J. Well now, there you are. I 'll call round again in the morning and see you. First thing. Good-bye, my dear Mrs. Ovens ; good-bye. I 'm very sorry. (*As he passes* MR. SKRIMSHIRE.) Don't be long.

(DR. JELLICOE *goes out.*)

MR. S. (*gently to* FRED). Er—Mr. Ovens.

FRED (*rising*). Sir ? (*Coming to the table and sitting in the right chair.*) This makes a difference, sir ?

MR. S. The old will is valid, of course ; the will he intended to supersede.

(MRS. OVENS *sits up and listens to the conversation.*)

MR. S. You are both acquainted with its provisions, I understand ?

FRED. I know he divided everything between her and me.

MR. S. That was it, roughly. And nothing fairer could have been arranged, in my opinion.

(EDIE *comes in with a white sheet. She gently places this over the body of* MR. OVENS, *so that it entirely drapes the seated figure like a shroud. They watch her in silence, and then* MR. SKRIMSHIRE *continues ; he refers to a paper.*)

He left this house and the one next door to you, Mr. Ovens ; the two houses in Hawthorn Lane to you, ma'am. The money invested is divided into two equal parts. Of course, yours is only for life, Mrs. Ovens. On your death—or re-marriage—it passes to Mr. Fred here.

MRS. O. (*with a sob*). Yes.

MR. S. I happened to bring a note of these pro-

visions with me, for reference in the business which, er—for which there was no occasion.

(MR. SKRIMSHIRE *rises, putting away his papers.*) That is all, I think. I won't intrude any longer. Terrible business. Very sorry. (*He goes to the door.*) Er—perhaps you will look us up at the office in a day or two, Mr. Ovens. We have acted for your father for a good many years, and we shall be very pleased to act for you if you wish it.

FRED. Thank you, sir. I dare say I 'll call.

(EDIE *shows* MR. SKRIMSHIRE *out.*)

(*A pause.* MRS. OVENS *looks at* FRED.)

MRS. O. And now, perhaps *you 'll* go, and leave me alone with my grief.

FRED. I don't stir from here.

MRS. O. It was *his* wish you shouldn't stop in this house. I 'll see *that* carried out, at any rate.

FRED. You 're forgetting one thing, mother.

MRS. O. What 's that ?

(EDIE *returns.*)

FRED. This is *my* house now. He left it me in his will.

(MRS. OVENS *sits up and stares at him.*) You 're not boss here any longer. Neither is *he.* *I 'm* master of the house.

(MRS. OVENS *rises to her feet.*) It 's not me that 's got to clear out ; it 's *you.*

MRS. O. Me !

EDIE. Fred, you 'll not turn her out to-night ?

FRED. I will indeed.

MRS. O. I won't go.

FRED. If you don't go I 'll put you out.

MRS. O. You wouldn't dare.

FRED. There 's nothing I 'd like better.

(MRS. OVENS *hesitates a second and then breaks down.*)

MRS. O. Oh ! I can't go to-night. To think that I was saying to Edie only just now what a worry he was, not knowing that he 'd never trouble me again. (*Appealing to him.*) Fred.

FRED (*implacable*). Get your hat and coat and take yourself off.

MRS. O. Edie, what am I to do ?

EDIE. You 'd better come home with me to-night, if he means it.

FRED. I do mean it.

(MRS. OVENS *dries her eyes, and gets up again.*)

MRS. O. You 're glad that he 's dead. (*She goes out.*)

FRED. I 'm not, though he was a hard man, and he treated me harshly. I 'd give a good deal if I hadn't stood there and cursed him a short while ago.

EDIE (*turning on him*). You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Fred Ovens. I never heard of such a thing. What, turn a wife out of the house when her husband's not yet cold !

FRED (*sullenly*). She was for turning me out.

EDIE. You know what her temper is. I thought better of you, indeed I did. No Christian would do what you 're doing.

(MRS. OVENS *returns with coat and bonnet on.*)

Fred, let her stay to-night. She 's your father's wife, remember.

FRED. That 's why I 'm turning her out. (*Strolling over to* MR. OVENS *and addressing him.*) I 'll show you who 's master of the house now.

MRS. O. There 's no need to waste words on him, Edie. I wouldn't stop in his house now if he went down on his bended knees. Come along. (EDIE *goes out.*) Good night, Fred Ovens. You 're master of the house, and may you pass a pleasant night in it with the man you cursed when he sat dead in his chair.

(MRS. OVENS *goes out.*)

(*The front door bangs.* FRED *shivers and moves to the front of the table and sits on the edge. He laughs quietly.*)

FRED. Pleasant night. Why shouldn't I ? (*To* MR. OVENS.) You won't interfere with me. I 'm not afraid of you. What is there to be afraid of ? (*He looks round fearfully, and his eye again returns to* MR. OVENS' *figure.*) You can't turn me out of doors now. I 'm boss here. (*The figure does not take any notice.* FRED *shivers again.*) I 'll go round to the King's Arms and have a drink, there 'll be company there. (*To* MR. OVENS *quickly.*) But I 'll come back for the night, mind you. You 'll not drive me away. (*He goes to the gas and turns it out, leaving the room in perfect darkness. He gropes his way to the door. Here he pauses.*) I 've no money. (*He thinks.*) They always used to keep some money in the sideboard drawer. (*He gropes his way to the sideboard on the extreme right, and stumbles against a chair.*) Can't see a thing, and I 've no matches. Wait a minute. (*He crosses to the window and pulls up the blind. Bright moonlight strikes through the window. He crosses to the sideboard and easily finds the drawer, opens it, and searches. There is*

*no money to be found. He takes a cash-box and turns towards the window with it to examine it carefully. As he turns he comes full on the silent figure of* MR. OVENS, *sitting rigid in his chair, shrouded in white, ghastly in the glare of the moon.* FRED *starts back with an oath and drops the cash-box.*) You can't frighten me. You shan't turn me out, I tell you. I 'm master of the house. (*He sits on the edge of the table looking at the figure for a long space. Then he speaks in a low, strained voice.*) Don't look at me like that. Don't look at me like that! I didn't know you were dead when I cursed you. (*Another pause: he shudders and covers his face with his hands.*) God! I can't stand it. (*He steals silently out of the room.* MR. OVENS *sits in his shroud in the moonlight, master of the house. The front door is heard closing.*)

*The* CURTAIN *descends very slowly.*

# THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

## CHARACTERS

MRS. MOUNTAIN (*a Widow*).

NELLY MOUNTAIN (*her Daughter*).

BOB PAINTER (NELLY'S *Fiancé*).

MR. SHOOSMITH.

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*The scene is the sitting-room of* MRS. MOUNTAIN'S *house, a small semi-detached dwelling in a southern suburb of Manchester. At the present day.*

# THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

*The sitting-room of* MRS. MOUNTAIN'S *house is a cosy little place, rather abundantly furnished with well-worn but well-preserved furniture. Most of the things were bought nearly thirty years ago. The window, with blinds drawn, is facing the spectator. The fireplace is in the wall on his right, the door in the wall on his left. The sofa, as a rule, is under the window, but to-night it has been pulled out from the wall at an angle, turned with its head up stage and towards the fireplace, so that the occupant can enjoy the warmth of the fire. An armchair is on the other side of the hearth, facing the sofa. The table, not a big dining-table, but a pretty old-fashioned gate-leg table, has been pushed a little to the spectator's left, to leave room to pass between it and the sofa. A chair is near it, and other chairs and furniture are about the room. A small table stands near the head of the sofa. The fire is lighted, and so are the gases on each side of the fireplace.*

MRS. MOUNTAIN, *a big, stout, florid woman of over fifty, is lying on the sofa. Her hair is very fair, now turning grey, and she wears it puffed out. She is wearing an elaborate pale-coloured dress, rather too young for her. Eyeglasses are on her nose. She has always a querulous, dissatisfied look, except when she tries to be nice, which is not often.* MRS. MOUNTAIN *is reading a novel from a suburban circulating library.*

*Presently she yawns and closes the book, and stretches her arms. The book slips from her fingers and falls behind the sofa on to the floor. She lazily tries to peer over the back of the sofa, but relapses again on to her cushions, and rings a small handbell which is on the table by the sofa. She rings it very loudly and long.*

*Presently* NELLY MOUNTAIN, *a capable but quiet and gentle girl of twenty-five, opens the door.*

NELLY. Was that your bell I heard, mother ?

MRS. MOUNTAIN. I 've dropped my novel.

NELLY (*coming forward*). You poor thing. Where is it ?

MRS. M. Behind the sofa.

(NELLY *picks up the novel.*)

NELLY. You 've lost your place, too.

MRS. M. It doesn't matter. I can't say it 's my style. What have you been doing ?

NELLY. Putting away the things from the laundry.

MRS. M. So sorry to bring you all the way downstairs, dear, but you know——

NELLY. Of course ; you must keep as quiet as possible. I 'd just finished when you rang. I shall stop with you now and read for a while.

(*She picks up another novel from the large table.*)

MRS. M. (*shivering*). I 'm sure the wind 's got into the east again.

NELLY. Do you feel it ?

MRS. M. Just a little. (*She shivers.*)

NELLY. Why haven't you got your shawl ?

(NELLY *takes a shawl from the back of the armchair and arranges it round* MRS. MOUNTAIN'S *shoulders. Then she kisses her.*)

MRS. M. Thank you, dear. I don't know what I should do without you.

(NELLY *takes up her novel, and sits in the arm-chair and prepares to read.*)

MRS. M. Who 's your book by, Nelly ?

NELLY. Charles Garvice.

MRS. M. Oh, is it ? I like Garvice. He 's *so* romantic. Is it good ?

NELLY. Awfully. I 've got to the most interesting part now.

MRS. M. I can't get on with mine at all. I think it would appeal to you. I suppose you wouldn't like to change, would you ?

NELLY. But I 'm just in the middle.

MRS. M. Oh, of course, if you 're so interested—I dare say I might look at the *Guardian* if you could find it, but the small print always makes my head ache.

NELLY. Don't be silly, dear. (*She puts her novel on the sofa and takes* MRS. MOUNTAIN'S *away.*)

MRS. M. Well, if you insist. You can finish it after I 've done with it, can't you ? Besides, I dare say Bob will be round soon.

NELLY. I dare say. (*A pause.*) Bob doesn't come round so often as he used to, does he ?

MRS. M. I don't know, Nelly ; he seems to come a good deal. Perhaps he thinks you 've not got so much time on your hands while I 'm ill.

(MRS. MOUNTAIN *begins to read.*)

NELLY. Bob spoke to me very seriously last time.

(MRS. MOUNTAIN *takes no notice.*)

NELLY. He was at me again to settle when we 're to be married.

(MRS. MOUNTAIN *goes on reading.*)

NELLY. He got quite bad-tempered about it.

MRS. M. Eh ? What do you say, dear ?

NELLY. I say Bob got quite angry when I told him I couldn't fix the day until you were a little better.

MRS. M. By the way, Nelly, I think I ought to mention it. I don't know, I 'm sure, but I suppose it 's a mother's duty, and I 've never shirked that, come what may.

NELLY. What on earth are you talking about, mother ?

MRS. M. Did you know that Bob takes Gladys Carpenter to the theatre ?

NELLY (*incredulously*). Bob ? (*She rises and stands by the fire so that her mother can't watch her.*)

MRS. M. He was at the Hippodrome with her last Saturday night.

NELLY. How do you know ?

MRS. M. Mrs. Willett told me this afternoon.

NELLY. What does Mrs. Willett know about it ?

MRS. M. Her maid Sarah told her. She was in the gallery with her young man, and Bob and Gladys Carpenter were in the arena stalls. You see he takes her into the best seats.

NELLY. Really, mother, it 's too bad of you to gossip about Bob with Mrs. Willett.

MRS. M. What could I do, Nelly ? I couldn't refuse to listen to her. If people are kind enough to come in and try and entertain me, I can't presume to dictate what they shall talk about. I ought to be only too grateful that any one thinks of me at all, nowadays.

(*There is a loud ring at the front door.*)

NELLY. That 's Bob! (*She goes to the door.*) Now, mother, don't say a word about this. I 'm sure it 's a mistake.

(NELLY *goes out and* MRS. MOUNTAIN *arranges herself interestingly in her cushions.* NELLY *comes in with* BOB PAINTER, *a tall ordinary-looking young man of twenty-nine or thirty, with a slight moustache.*)

BOB (*heartily*). Well, Mrs. Mountain. How are you to-day ?

MRS. M. (*wanly*). I 'm afraid I 'm not very well, Bob.

(*She holds out her hand limply. He shakes it.*)

BOB. Sorry to hear that. The boss has given me a couple of tickets for the theatre. He booked them for himself and he can't go, and I didn't refuse them, you bet.

(*He shows the tickets.*)

NELLY. How lovely. Are they for the Royal ? That 's Fred Terry and Julia Neilson.

BOB. No, they 're for the Gaiety.

NELLY. Oh, the Gaiety. (*Her tone is disappointed.*)

BOB. But they say it 's very funny all the same. By one of these local authors. Now, buck up, and get ready ; we 've no time to lose.

NELLY. But—I don't think I can come, Bob.

BOB. What ?

NELLY. I don't, really.

BOB. Why not ?

NELLY. I don't like to leave mother.

BOB. What about the servant ?

NELLY. It 's her night out.

BOB. Be hanged to her night out !

MRS. M. You know, Bob, a servant will have her night out. You can't get them to stay without it.

BOB. Well, what about Nelly 's night out ? Isn't she ever going to have one ?

MRS. M. *I* don't want to stand in her way. You mustn't let me prevent you from enjoying yourself, Nelly, if Bob insists on you going. Of course it would be very awkward if I were to have a stroke—with no one in the house.

BOB (*reasoning*). Yes, but why *should* you have a stroke ? You look healthy enough. Do you feel like having one ?

MRS. M. Yes, you may well say that, Bob. That shows how much you know about my complaint. I never get any sympathy, just because I 've a good colour. Let me tell you, that a good colour is one of the very worst symptoms I could possibly have.

BOB. But what is it that 's the matter with you, exactly ?

MRS. M. Oh well, if you wish me to go into all the details over again—but it 'll take some time, I assure you, and you 've not too much to spare if you 're going to the theatre, let alone that there are *some* things that I *couldn't* very well tell you.

NELLY. It 's no use, Bob, mother can't be left alone.

MRS. M. (*with profound resignation*). Oh, it doesn't matter about *me* ; it 's very good of you all the same—pass me my salts, dear, will you——

NELLY (*passing the bottle of salts from the mantelpiece*). Does your head ache ?

MRS. M. It throbs rather badly. I 'm afraid it 's with talking. (*She smells the salts.*) Of course, if you are *determined* to go, I dare say I can manage. I ought to have my gruel at half-past eight, but I suppose I can get up and make it myself, if the kitchen fire hasn't gone out. And then I shall want to go to bed long before you 'll be back, and you know I 've always said I shall turn faint some day when I 'm going upstairs and fall headlong. I suppose it would kill me if there wasn't anybody in the house to attend to me. And then of course there 's my hot-water bottle. I *must* have that when I go to bed, because I have to be very particular about not lying in bed with cold feet. I can manage to fill it myself, I suppose, if there 's any hot water in the tap, but if there isn't I should have to boil some, and of course if the kitchen fire *has* gone out that would be very awkward.

NELLY. I know, dear; I shouldn't think of leaving you alone. I was wondering if Mrs. Willett would come and sit with you.

MRS. M. I dare say she would—though with my head throbbing like it is, I don't really feel equal to talking to Mrs. Willett all evening.

NELLY (*leaning over her and stroking her hair*). Very well, dear, I 'll stay with you myself.

BOB (*under his breath*). Oh, damn !

MRS. M. (*faintly*). What did Bob say ?

NELLY (*frowning at* BOB). He didn't say anything, dear.

MRS. M. I 'm very sorry to stand in the way of your evening's amusement, Bob, but I 'm sure you 'd

never forgive yourself if you came back and found me sitting dead in my chair.

BOB. That 's all right, Mrs. Mountain. It 's settled. We won't talk about it. I 'll stop here with Nelly.

NELLY. Thank you, Bob. (*She smiles at him.*)

BOB. I suppose I can have a pipe. (*He pulls it out.*)

MRS. M. I don't think it will do me any harm.

BOB. Oh, if there 's any doubt— (*He is putting it back.*)

MRS. M. No, no. I insist. You must have your pipe.

BOB. Very well. (*He fills and lights his pipe.*)

MRS. M. Whatever happens I won't have it said that I was selfish enough to interfere with anybody else's comfort.

BOB. Well now, Mrs. Mountain, since we 're all here, I want to have a little talk with you.

MRS. M. Nelly was saying just now that you——

BOB. Yes, I want to get married. Nelly and I have been engaged close on four years now.

MRS. M. How time flies, doesn't it ?

BOB. That 's what I 'm thinking. I don't like wasting it. When we got engaged we arranged to be married in three years.

NELLY. But you know, Bob, mother was ill then.

BOB. I know. And she 's been ill ever since, off and on, especially when we begin to talk about fixing the day.

MRS. M. Well, if you think I make a martyr of myself for pleasure——

BOB. I don't say you do, and I don't say you don't. What I say is, what does it matter ?

MRS. M. Oh, it doesn't matter at all, of course, to a great strong man like you what happens to a poor helpless creature like me.

BOB. No, no. I mean, why can't we get married in spite of it?

NELLY. But who would look after mother? Could she—could she come and live with us?

BOB (*decidedly*). No.

MRS. M. You 've no need to say it like that, Bob. I 'm not the sort of person to push myself where I 'm not wanted, even if I haven't got a relation in the world except Nelly, barring my sister Jinny, who lives at Newcastle - on - Tyne, and couldn't look after me if she were willing, seeing that she 's got a husband and eleven children to look after already; and if that 's not enough for one woman, I don't know.

BOB. Now look here. We 're arranging the summer holidays at the warehouse. We 've got to do it early on, so as not to clash with one another. I 've the chance of ten days at the end of June. Just the right time for a honeymoon. (*He produces a pocket diary.*) Will you fix the day for June 21? That 's just under three months off.

NELLY. What do you think, mother?

MRS. M. You mustn't mind me. I shall be dead and gone by that time, as likely as not.

NELLY (*gently*). But, dear, we 've got to fix it some time or other.

MRS. M. Fix it whenever you please, Nelly. *I 'm* not going to stand in your way. If the worst comes to the worst I can go into the workhouse.

BOB. Oh, be damned to the workhouse! (*He rises.*)

NELLY. Bob!

BOB (*angry*). What sense is there in talking about the workhouse when you 've nearly three pounds a week coming in, as well as the house. Why, you can afford to pay a companion to come and look after you.

(*He walks up and down.*)

MRS. M. Very well. Nelly 's quite at liberty to do whatever she fancies, if she can endure the thought of turning me off to die under the hands of a stranger.

BOB. But, you know, it 's a bit thick, it is really. Nelly can't go on taking care of you to the end of her life. It 's not fair to her—and it 's not fair to me, either.

MRS. M. Ah! So it 's yourself you 're thinking of all the time, Bob Painter.

BOB (*angrily*). Well, it 's only natural for a fellow to want to get married. I tell you I 'm sick of waiting, and I 'm not going to wait much longer.

MRS. M. (*exasperated*). Then you 'd better ask Gladys Carpenter to marry you.

BOB. Eh? (*He stops in surprise.*)

MRS. M. Yes. You may well look like that. You took her to the Hippodrome, and you can't deny it, try as you may.

NELLY. Mother!

MRS. M. Don't mother me in that tone of voice. I know a mother's duty——

NELLY. Mother, *please*! I can trust Bob. I don't believe he *did* take Gladys Carpenter to the Hippodrome.

MRS. M. What! When Mrs. Willett's Sarah saw him,

and told Mrs. Willett, and Mrs. Willett told me !

NELLY. It wasn't Bob, it was some one else. Wasn't it, Bob ?

BOB (*quite simply*). No, it was me all right, Nelly.

(*A pause.*)

I asked you first, you know, Nelly. You remember ; Saturday night.

NELLY. Of course. Mother wasn't well, and I couldn't go.

BOB. I didn't like to waste the tickets, so I—I asked Gladys. I 've known her a long time.

NELLY. But you might have told me about it.

BOB. Haven't been here since Saturday.

NELLY. No, of course not. (*A slight pause.*) I don't mind, Bob. It would have been a shame to waste the tickets.

(MRS. MOUNTAIN *snorts.*)

MRS. M. You 'd better take Gladys Carpenter to the Gaiety to-night.

(*A pause.*)

NELLY. Would you like to, Bob ?

BOB. What ?

NELLY. Take Gladys to the Gaiety ?

BOB. I dare say she 'd go if I asked her.

NELLY. Then do.

BOB. Don't you mind ?

NELLY. Not a bit.

BOB. You see, it 's rotten for a chap to go alone, and—and—it would be a shame——

MRS. M. To waste the tickets.

(*A pause.*)

(BOB *looks at his watch.*)

BOB. Well, I 'd better be getting along.

NELLY. You 'll miss the curtain-raiser, won't you ?

BOB. Shan't miss much, I dare say. Good night, Mrs. Mountain. Sorry I got my hair off just now.

(MRS. MOUNTAIN *doesn't reply.*)

BOB (*at the door*). I 'd just like a word with you, Nelly.

(BOB *goes out, and* NELLY *follows him.*)

(*As soon as the door is closed* MRS. MOUNTAIN *sits up briskly, and looks towards the door, but it is closed, and she can hear nothing. Accordingly with a grunt of annoyance she thumps the cushions and lies down in her former position. Very soon* NELLY *comes in.*)

MRS. M. What was it he wanted to say to you ?

NELLY. He says I 've got to let him know to-morrow for certain whether we can be married on June 21.

MRS. M. Well, of course, Nelly, you must be guided by your own feelings. You mustn't think of me. I don't suppose I shall be here to trouble you much longer.

(NELLY *walks to the fireplace without replying.*)

Of course, he 's fond of Gladys Carpenter, there 's no doubt about that.

NELLY (*pettishly*). I don't want to hear any more about Gladys Carpenter, mother.

(*The front-door bell rings.*)

MRS. M. Good gracious! He 's not come back, surely ?

NELLY. I don't think so. (*She goes to the window and peeps through the blind*). It looks rather like Mr. Shoosmith.

MRS. M. (*with animation*). Mr. Shoosmith !

(NELLY *goes out.* MRS. MOUNTAIN *jumps up very, very quickly, whips the shawl from her shoulders like lightning, rolls it up, and pushes it under the sofa. Then she examines herself in the mantel glass, touches her hair, takes off her eyeglasses, and smiles at herself. She rearranges the cushions and again takes her place on the sofa, but this time she sits up rather than lies down.* NELLY *returns with* MR. SHOOSMITH, *a stout, rather coarse, downright healthy man of fifty-five.*)

MR. SHOOSMITH (*breezily*). Good evening, Mrs. Mountain. (*He rubs his hands.*) Nippy outside to-night. And how 's yourself ?

MRS. M. (*brightly*). Much as usual, Mr. Shoosmith.

MR. S. You look like a blooming rose, upon my word.

MRS. M. Take the armchair, Mr. Shoosmith.

MR. S. (*politely*). Ladies first.

(*He indicates the armchair to* NELLY.)

NELLY. Oh, I 'm not stopping. I 've got to write a note.

MR. S. Then that 's all right. (*He sits in the armchair.*) And where 's the faithful Bob to-night ?

NELLY. I 'm surprised you didn't meet him. He 's gone to the theatre.

MR. S. And why hasn't he taken you ?

NELLY. Oh, *I* couldn't leave mother.

MR. S. Now what a pity I wasn't a few minutes earlier. I could have kept your mother company.

(*He smiles at* MRS. MOUNTAIN, *who smiles cheerfully back at him.*)

NELLY. *You* wouldn't have been much use. It 's a nurse that mother wants.

MR. S. } (*together*) { A nurse !
MRS. M. } { Nelly, don't be silly.

NELLY. I wish you could persuade her to see Dr. Hodgkinson, Mr. Shoosmith. I 'm always asking her to let me call him in, but she pretends there 's nothing the matter with her.

MR. S. (*adjusting a pair of spectacles*). But, God bless my soul, she 's the picture of health. Look at her colour !

NELLY. That 's one of the worst symptoms she could possibly have. And you see, nobody will believe there 's anything wrong with her while she looks so bright and rosy. Even Bob doesn't know how ill she is. She 's so brave she tries to hide it from people, but she can't hide it from me.

MR. S. But what 's the matter with her ?

MRS. M. (*pettishly*). There 's nothing at all the matter with me. I wish you 'd be quiet, Nelly.

NELLY. How *can* you talk like that, mother ? Do you know, Mr. Shoosmith, that I have to help her upstairs every night, and she has to have her breakfast in bed every morning. She 's not fit to get up for it. Whenever she tries to do a bit of housework she gets knocked up directly, and has to give in. In fact, she 's been so weak just lately that she couldn't do anything but lie on that sofa and read.

MR. S. She always seems chirpy enough when I 'm here of an evening.

NELLY. Yes, she brightens up wonderfully whenever anybody calls. I wish you 'd look in oftener.

(NELLY *turns and goes to the door.*)

MRS. M. You 'll mind the kitchen fire doesn't go out, Nelly, won't you ?

NELLY. I 'll have a look at it.

(NELLY *goes out.*)

MR. S. Well, Mrs. Mountain, I 'm downright sorry to hear you 're not so well. It 's bad news to take away with me.

(*He rises and stands with his back to the fire.*)

MRS. M. Are you going away again ? You are a busy man. How long are you going for, this time ?

MR. S. For good.

MRS. M. For good ?

MR. S. Ay.

MRS. M. Do you mean you 're leaving Manchester ?

MR. S. I do. I 've come here to-night to say good-bye. You see, the other day the manager of our Liverpool shop went and popped it.

MRS. M. Popped it ?

MR. S. (*pointing to the ceiling*). Slipped his cable—went to glory.

MRS. M. Oh, you mean he died.

MR. S. That 's it ; only I believe in putting these things delicately. Well, they 've given me the job. I start to-morrow morning.

MRS. M. Well, Mr. Shoosmith, this *is* a blow.

(MRS. MOUNTAIN *is concerned but not at all affected.*)

MR. S. It 's a bit of a staggerer. I shall miss you, Mrs. Mountain.

MRS. M. It 's very nice of you to say so.

MR. S. It 's been very pleasant for a lonely widower

living in 'digs,' to drop in and enjoy a little female society now and then.

MRS. M. We 've always been glad to see you.

MR. S. Thank you. Thank you. (*A pause. He looks at his watch.*) Well, Mrs. Mountain, I 'm afraid it 's good-bye.

(MRS. MOUNTAIN *stands up and offers her hand.* MR. SHOOSMITH *takes it, and then changes his mind.*)

MR. S. Just sit down again for a minute, will you? I think I 'd better tell you. We 're not boy and girl, you know. We 're both on the wrong side of fifty, I take it.

MRS. M. Oh, Mr. Shoosmith!

MR. S. Well, I am. Aren't *you*?

MRS. M. (*hesitating*). Just.

MR. S. Of course. I knew. Nelly's getting on for thirty.

(MRS. MOUNTAIN *sits down again on the sofa.*)

MR. S. Well, as I say, we 're old enough to talk plainly. I don't mind telling you that I came here to-night on purpose to ask you to marry me.

MRS. M. Mr. Shoosmith! (*She is genuinely surprised.*)

MR. S. I even took the liberty of bringing a ring with me. (*He produces it.*) See? It belonged to the late Mrs. Shoosmith. (*He puts the ring back in his pocket.*)

MRS. M. But—don't put it back, Mr. Shoosmith.

MR. S. Why not?

MRS. M. I 've not refused you.

MR. S. I 've not asked you, Mrs. Mountain.

MRS. M. I—I thought you did.

MR. S. No. You don't catch me marrying a confirmed invalid.

MRS. M. But I 'm not a confirmed invalid.

MR. S. If half of what Nelly said was true I guess you 're confirmed enough to settle my hash. I *should* be a fool to start at this new place with a wife who couldn't do any housework, and had to have her breakfast in bed every morning.

MRS. M. You 're very cruel, Mr. Shoosmith. (*She begins to sob gently.*) I think you might have kept your mouth shut, and gone away without telling me all this.

MR. S. (*concerned*). I 'm sorry. I thought you 'd *like* to know. I thought you 'd take it as a compliment.

(MRS. MOUNTAIN *sobs and rings her handbell.*)

MR. S. Upon my soul, I can't understand it properly even yet. I always thought what a fine healthy woman you were. I tell you straight, I nearly got let in ; I did indeed.

(MRS. MOUNTAIN *rings the bell.*)

MR. S. Do you want anything ?

MRS. M. I want Nelly to show you out.

MR. S. (*taken aback*). Oh, all right. I can take a hint. (*She sobs.*) I say I can take a hint. But you can't blame me for not marrying a confirmed invalid. I 've had some. My first wife was a confirmed invalid.

(NELLY *comes in with a letter in her hand.*)

NELLY. Were you ringing ?

MRS. M. Mr. Shoosmith is going, Nelly.

NELLY. Oh, would you mind posting this letter in the pillar-box for me, Mr. Shoosmith ?

MR. S. Pleasure. (*He takes the letter and turns to* MRS. MOUNTAIN *and half offers his hand.*) Good-bye again, Mrs. Mountain.

MRS. M. (*ignoring his hand*). Good-bye, Mr. Shoosmith.

(MR. SHOOSMITH *and* NELLY *go out.* MRS. MOUNTAIN *rubs her eyes and cheeks with her handkerchief.* NELLY *returns.*)

MRS. M. (*faintly*). I think I 'll have my gruel now, Nelly.

NELLY. Is your head bad again ?

MRS. M. Yes. (*She leans back on her cushions and closes her eyes.*)

NELLY. Why, you 've dropped your shawl.

(NELLY *picks up the shawl from under the sofa, and arranges it round* MRS. MOUNTAIN'S *shoulders. She goes towards the door and then stops.*)

NELLY. By the way, I 've written to Bob.

(MRS. MOUNTAIN *just opens her eyes.*)

I told him I can't fix any date at present ; and—and if he can't wait any longer he 'd better break off the engagement.

(MRS. MOUNTAIN *stares at her.*)

You see, it wasn't—it wasn't fair to Bob.

(NELLY *seems as if she is going to continue, but she doesn't say anything after all ; and after standing still a moment turns quickly and goes straight out of the room.* MRS. MOUNTAIN *reaches for her novel, and with a sigh of content settles down to it.*)

*The* CURTAIN *falls.*

# FANCY FREE

## CHARACTERS

FANCY.

ALFRED.

ETHELBERT.

DELIA.

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*The scene represents the writing-room of the Hotel Cosmopolitan, Babylon-on-Sea.*

# FANCY FREE

*The writing-room of the Hotel Cosmopolitan is a tall, handsome apartment, exquisitely furnished. The great fireplace faces the spectator, with a lounge chair on each side. Near him, on his left, is a double writing-table containing two desks opposite one another. Chairs face each desk. Still farther left is a settee against the wall. On his right a settee placed at right angles to the wall, a small low table, and a low padded armchair. There is another writing-table on the right of the fireplace, and a bookcase on the left. The two entrances, each with double doors, are set diagonally across the two visible corners of the room, one right and one left.*

*The fire is burning, and the electric lights are on. It is a little after ten o'clock.*

FANCY, *in an evening gown, is sitting on the right hand of the double desk, trying to compose a letter. She is petite, dark, and pretty.* ALFRED *comes in from the left in evening dress. He is tall, fair, clean-shaven, and handsome.*

FANCY (*looking up*). Well ?

ALFRED. I find that the last post goes at midnight. It is now exactly a quarter-past ten.

FANCY. Then I have still an hour and three-quarters in which to finish the letter.

(ALFRED *kneels on the chair on the other side of the double desk and watches* FANCY.)

ALFRED. I am disappointed in you, Fancy. I knew that I should be disappointed in you some day, but I did not expect it to come so soon.

FANCY. My dear Alfred, pray do not forget that this is no ordinary letter.

ALFRED. It ought not to be so difficult to tell one's husband that one has run away from him.

FANCY. But I have had so little experience. I dare say I shall improve with practice.

ALFRED. How far have you got ?

FANCY. I 'll read it to you. ' Darling Ethelbert——'

ALFRED. Stop ! Ought you to call him darling now ?

FANCY. Why not ?

ALFRED. A sensitive mind might detect something inappropriate in the adjective.

FANCY. I always call him darling when I write to him. I feel sure he would feel hurt if I omitted to do so on this occasion. Besides, I am still very fond of him.

ALFRED. Perhaps you are right. We cannot too scrupulously avoid wounding him.

FANCY (*reading*):

> ' DARLING ETHELBERT,—You will be interested to hear that since you went to Scotland on Thursday last I have decided to run away with Alfred. You cannot have forgotten the promises we made each other on our wedding-day. I am not referring to those we made publicly during the marriage ceremony, but to our private understanding that each should be entirely free and untrammelled provided

that the other's health and comfort was not interfered with. You will understand, therefore, that in leaving you and going away with Alfred I am doing nothing that is contrary to our agreement. You would have been entitled to complain only if I had insisted on bringing Alfred home with me.'

That 's logic, isn't it ?

ALFRED. Yes. Feminine logic.

FANCY. That is all Ethelbert has any right to expect from me.

ALFRED. How do you procced ?

FANCY. I don't. That is the difficulty.

ALFRED. At any rate, Fancy, you have madc it clear to Ethelbert that you have left him. That is all that is essential. You have only to wind up now.

FANCY. How ? ' Yours faithfully ' ?

ALFRED. Why not ' Yours formerly ' ?

FANCY. But I am afraid that is too abrupt. Ethelbert is so sensitive. I should likc to wind up with something kind.

ALFRED. Let me see. ' You will be glad to hear that we are having an awfully jolly time here.'

FANCY. I doubt whether Ethelbert would be glad to hear it.

ALFRED. Then something chatty or discursive. ' The Cosmopolitan is an exceedingly nice hotel. It contains no fewer than 250 bedrooms, each elaborately furnished with all modern conveniences.'

FANCY. Ethelbert will hardly care for such details. Besides, I do not consider that the Cosmopolitan is such a nice hotel.

ALFRED. It is an exceedingly expensive one. Let us endeavour to extract as much enjoyment out of it as possible.

FANCY. I am sure that I should have preferred the Grand Rendevous.

ALFRED. The Grand Rendevous is, if possible, still more expensive.

FANCY. What does that matter ?

ALFRED. To you, little or nothing. It is I who have to pay the bill.

FANCY. Alfred, you have the soul of a stock-broker.

ALFRED. Do not flatter me. I have sometimes hoped I had.

FANCY. If I had realised how useless you would be in an emergency, I doubt whether I should have run away with you.

ALFRED. My dear Fancy, I did not run away with you in order to conduct your correspondence. You should have advertised for a private secretary. I had hoped to be something more to you than that.

FANCY (*rising*). I shall go to my room. It is quite impossible for me to finish this letter here.

ALFRED. Why ?

FANCY. This room is far too crowded.

ALFRED. This is not a quarrel, I trust, Fancy.

FANCY. Certainly not. I hope I have too much tact to quarrel with you on the first day of our elopement.

(FANCY *goes to the door with her letter.*)

ALFRED. When may I expect to see you again ?

FANCY. The last post goes at midnight.

(FANCY *goes out* L. *Hardly has she gone than* ETHELBERT *comes in* R. *He is a good-looking, dark man, in evening dress.*)

ALFRED (*thunderstruck*). Ethelbert !

ETHELBERT. Alfred !

ALFRED. My dear fellow.

ETHELBERT. How are you, old chap ?

ALFRED. What brings you here ? I understood you were travelling on business.

ETHELBERT. So I am. Extremely private business.

ALFRED. How singular that we should meet !

ETHELBERT. Are you here on business too ?

ALFRED. Er—yes. Extremely private business also.

ETHELBERT. Come. Let us sit down and talk.

(*He sits in the armchair* R. *of the fire.*)

ALFRED. With pleasure. But do not let us talk here.

ETHELBERT. Why not ?

ALFRED. This is an exceedingly dull room.

ETHELBERT. It is a very charming room.

ALFRED. But I assure you, I have been here quite half an hour, and nothing whatever has happened.

ETHELBERT. Then we can talk the more comfortably.

(ALFRED *sits down reluctantly.*)

ALFRED. Where were you going when you came in here ?

ETHELBERT. I was looking for the American bar.

ALFRED. Excellent ! We will go and look for it together. (*He rises.*)

ETHELBERT. Presently. There is no hurry. (ALFRED *sits down.*)

ALFRED (*yawning*). Do you know, Ethelbert, I feel I ought to be getting to bed.

ETHELBERT. Bed ? Why, it is only half-past ten.

ALFRED. I promised my mother, before she died, that whenever practicable I would be in bed by half-past ten.

ETHELBERT. But I want to talk to you about Fancy.

ALFRED. About Fancy! Do you think you ought to talk to me about Fancy? The relations of a husband and wife should be sacred, surely.

ETHELBERT. I want to ask your advice, Alfred. I have begun to suspect that Fancy is growing tired of me.

ALFRED (*looking at his watch*). I must positively be in bed before ten o'clock——

ETHELBERT. Why does a woman grow tired of a man?

ALFRED. Because the last post goes at midnight.

ETHELBERT. No. Because she prefers somebody else.

ALFRED (*interested*). Do you suspect that Fancy is in love with somebody else?

ETHELBERT. I do.

ALFRED. Who is he?

ETHELBERT. I have no idea. I wish I had.

ALFRED. Don't you think you will be much happier if you remain in ignorance?

ETHELBERT. Oh, I am not thinking of myself. I am thinking of him.

ALFRED. Indeed.

ETHELBERT. Yes. I should like to warn him.

ALFRED. To warn him?

ETHELBERT. I 'm afraid she 'll be running away with the poor fellow.

ALFRED (*uneasily*). Why do you call him a poor fellow?

ETHELBERT. Fancy is so terribly extravagant. She

spends money like water, especially when it is not her own.

ALFRED (*unthinkingly*). Have *you* found that out, too ?

ETHELBERT. Of course I've found it out, and so would you if you had been married to her as long as I have. Candidly, I 'm afraid Fancy will ruin the poor fellow.

ALFRED. What has that to do with you ?

ETHELBERT. I hope I am a humane person, Alfred. I would not willingly see my worst enemy reduced to the workhouse, and this poor fellow may be one of my friends. I should be intensely sorry if one of my friends ruined himself for the sake of my wife. I can assure you that she is not worth it. In my experience, very few women are.

ALFRED. Ethelbert, forgive me if I point out that you are not looking at this affair in the proper way.

ETHELBERT. Indeed ? In what way do you consider that I ought to look at it ?

ALFRED. Do you mean to say that you are not indignant at the idea of another man eloping with your wife ?

ETHELBERT. Not in the least.

ALFRED (*warmly*). Then you ought to be, that 's all.

ETHELBERT. When I married Fancy we arranged to leave each other absolutely free. I am a gentleman, Alfred ; you would not have me break my word.

ALFRED. But it is quite inconceivable ! You are without any sense of moral responsibility. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

ETHELBERT. I very often am. Aren't you ?

ALFRED. Certainly not. I regulate my life, I am thankful to say, by a strict rule of conduct, which I observe as closely as possible. If I have lapses, so much the worse. They are regrettable, but not unnatural. At any rate, I have the immense consolation of knowing that my principles are not lax, but that I have merely failed to adhere to them for once in a way.

ETHELBERT. Believe me, Alfred, it is a mistake to have too many principles.

ALFRED. Why ?

ETHELBERT. Because if you have too many it is quite impossible to stick to them all. I content myself with one only.

ALFRED. What is that ?

ETHELBERT. Never be a hypocrite. It is an excellent maxim. It permits you to do whatever you please, provided you don't pretend you are not doing it. I advise you to adopt it and to drop all your other principles.

ALFRED. Do you insinuate that I am a hypocrite ?

ETHELBERT. Not at all.

ALFRED. Then you are wrong. I am.

ETHELBERT. Really ? You grow more interesting every day.

ALFRED. Please do not flatter me. I am conscious that I do not deserve it. Ethelbert, your deplorable views about morality have awakened my conscience. I must conceal the truth from you no longer. Besides, I think it is extremely probable that you would have found it out in any case very shortly.

ETHELBERT. What do you mean ?

ALFRED. I knew, all the time, that Fancy was in love with another man.

ETHELBERT. How ?

ALFRED. Because I am that other man.

ETHELBERT. You don't say so ! Permit me to offer you my sincere condolences.

ALFRED. Thank you.

(*They shake hands gravely.*)

ETHELBERT. How fortunate that I should be able to warn you before it is too late !

ALFRED. Ethelbert, you must know all. It is too late. I have already run away with your wife.

ETHELBERT. Already ! When did it happen ?

ALFRED. This morning.

ETHELBERT. This morning ? Then——

ALFRED. Yes. You are right. Fancy is actually in this hotel at the present moment.

ETHELBERT. Upon my soul, Alfred, this is most unfriendly of you.

ALFRED. Go on. I am conscious that I merit all your reproaches.

ETHELBERT. I call it grossly indelicate to bring Fancy to the very hotel in which I am staying.

ALFRED. But, hang it all, we did not know that you were staying here. You don't suppose we chose it for that reason, do you ? We thought you were in Scotland.

ETHELBERT. Ah, true. I did go to Scotland. I spoke without reflecting. I beg your pardon, Alfred.

ALFRED (*politely*). Not at all.

(*A pause.*)

ETHELBERT. Well, and how do you get on with Fancy ?

ALFRED. I hardly think I am justified in venturing upon an opinion upon such a slight acquaintance.

ETHELBERT. I wonder if I may presume to offer you some advice ?

ALFRED. By all means.

ETHELBERT. If you are going to succeed in managing Fancy, you will have to put your foot down at once.

ALFRED. Put my foot down ?

ETHELBERT. How much have you spent to-day ?

ALFRED. About seven hundred and fifty pounds.

ETHELBERT. I thought so.

ALFRED. Fancy bought a motor-car this afternoon.

ETHELBERT. She will buy another to-morrow.

ALFRED. But I can't afford it. How did you succeed in curbing her extravagance ?

ETHELBERT. I threatened to advertise in the papers that I should not be responsible for any debts contracted by my wife.

ALFRED. Since she is not my wife I can hardly do that, can I ?

ETHELBERT. You might advertise that you will not be responsible for any debts contracted by *my* wife.

ALFRED. Don't you think that would be a little pointed ?

ETHELBERT. Perhaps it would.

ALFRED. No, Ethelbert, there is only one way out of the difficulty. I will resign Fancy to you.

ETHELBERT. Not on any account.

ALFRED (*rising*). Yes. I cannot allow you to outbid me in generosity. I will go and find her and bring her to you.

ETHELBERT (*rising*). For heaven's sake, don't tell my wife I am staying here.

ALFRED. Why not ?

ETHELBERT. Because I am not alone.

ALFRED. Not alone ?

ETHELBERT. Her name is Delia.

ALFRED (*indignantly*). Ethelbert !

ETHELBERT. Well, Alfred ?

ALFRED. You shock me, gravely.

ETHELBERT. You are very thin-skinned. Have you already forgotten what errand brought you to this hotel ?

ALFRED (*with dignity*). There is no reason why you should make my lapse an excuse for your own. Have you thought of your wife ?

ETHELBERT. She need never know, unless you tell her.

ALFRED. I thought you said that Fancy and you agreed to leave each other entirely free.

ETHELBERT. We gave each other our word of honour.

ALFRED. Then why do you wish to hide the truth from her ?

ETHELBERT. Fancy is not a gentleman. She is a woman. She does not understand the meaning of honour.

ALFRED. You are trifling. I regret to say, Ethelbert, that I shall consider it my duty to inform your wife immediately of the whole deplorable business.

ETHELBERT. So be it. Far be it from me to try and induce you to act contrary to the dictates of your conscience.

(FANCY *comes in* L. *with a letter.*)

FANCY. Ethelbert!

ETHELBERT. Fancy!

FANCY. How fortunate! I can give you this letter now. That will save a penny stamp.

ETHELBERT. Thank you. I will destroy the letter.

(*He tears it and throws it in the fire.*)

FANCY. Oh, why did you do that? It took me such a long time to write.

ETHELBERT. I am already aware of its contents.

FANCY. You have told him, Alfred?

ALFRED. Yes.

FANCY. Then, Ethelbert, may I ask what you are doing here? I consider it grossly indelicate of you to follow us about like this. You wouldn't like it yourself.

ALFRED. Ethelbert has not followed us. He has come here for a reason of his own.

FANCY. A reason of his own?

ALFRED. Yes. How can I tell you? (*A pause.*) Her name is Delia.

FANCY. Oh! Oh! Ethelbert, how dare you?

ETHELBERT. My dear Fancy, you remember what we arranged?

FANCY. I don't care what we arranged. You have had the bad taste to prefer another woman to me. I shall never forgive you.

ETHELBERT. But, Fancy, listen.

FANCY. I shall not listen. I don't want to hear a single word about her. Where did you meet her?

ETHELBERT. She was staying at my hotel in Edinburgh.

FANCY. That was no reason why you should have spoken to her.

ETHELBERT. I didn't. She spoke to me. We were sitting at adjoining tables in the Winter Garden.

FANCY. She dropped a glove ? A handkerchief ?

ETHELBERT. How did you know that ?

FANCY. Never mind.

ETHELBERT. Of course I picked it up.

FANCY. And what did she say to you ?

ETHELBERT. She said, 'Do you know, you 've got the most delightfully wicked eyes.' That was how it began.

(DELIA *comes in* R. *She is a tall, gorgeously-dressed and beautiful woman, with a mass of red-gold hair.*)

DELIA (*in a fury*). Really, Bertie, this is too bad. I 've been looking for you all over the hotel.

ALFRED. This, I presume, is the lady in question.

ETHELBERT. My dear Delia, I am exceedingly sorry that I have been detained, but this lady is an old acquaintance of mine. She is, in fact, my wife.

DELIA. Indeed. (*To* FANCY.) So you are his wife ?

FANCY. As it happens.

DELIA. I am very glad to meet you, if only to have the opportunity of complaining about the way you have trained your husband.

FANCY. I did not train him.

DELIA. That is just what I complain about. Under the circumstances I can forgive his leaving me

alone in the Lounge of a strange hotel, but his table manners are frankly uncivilised. Do you know that he reads the morning paper during breakfast ?

FANCY. He never does so at home.

DELIA. You must not expect to make me believe that.

FANCY. But it is perfectly true During breakfast I always read the morning paper myself.

DELIA. Ah, no doubt in self-defence.

FANCY. Not at all.

DELIA. I suppose one can become inured to anything, in time, even to Bertie's light breakfast conversation.

FANCY. That shows how superficial your acquaintance with Ethelbert is. I like his breakfast conversation because he goes on talking without stopping. Consequently, it is not necessary for me to pay any attention to him, and I can read the morning paper in peace.

ETHELBERT. This is most unkind of you both. My light breakfast conversation has always been much admired, especially by ladies. (*To* DELIA.) I am sure you will alter your opinion if you will only do me the favour, Delia, of listening a little more carefully to-morrow morning.

FANCY. Certainly not.

ETHELBERT. I beg your pardon ?

FANCY. She will have no opportunity of listening to you more carefully.

ETHELBERT. Why not ?

FANCY. Because you will breakfast with me to-morrow morning.

ETHELBERT. Oh, very well, then perhaps *you* will do me the favour of listening more carefully.

FANCY. I fancy that during breakfast to-morrow you will be fully occupied in listening to me, for once in a way. I do not think that I shall have sufficient time to say all I wish to say to you to-night. You have provided me with a very fruitful topic.

ETHELBERT. But, my dear Fancy, I fear we can hardly pursue it to-night. We both appear to have previous engagements.

DELIA (*to* ETHELBERT). *You* have no previous engagement.

ETHELBERT. Delia!

DELIA. It is cancelled.

ETHELBERT. You are cruel, Delia.

DELIA. It is your own fault. How can you expect any self-respecting woman to put up with the treatment I have received from you?

FANCY. May I ask what further complaint you have to make about my husband?

DELIA. He has no sense of decency. I consider it grossly indelicate of him to bring me to this hotel whilst you are stopping here. I have never been treated in such a manner before.

FANCY. I think you take a very proper view of the affair. Ethelbert ought to be thoroughly ashamed of himself.

DELIA. Good-bye, Bertie. (*She holds out her hand.*) I shall never listen to your light breakfast conversation again.

FANCY. And good-bye, Alfred. (*She holds out her hand.*) My only regret is that I shall never know what your light breakfast conversation is like.

ALFRED. Don't say that, Fancy. Why shouldn't we all four have breakfast together in the morning ?

DELIA. No. I am sorry, but I must draw the line somewhere.

FANCY. You are right. You have the most perfect taste. I am beginning to admire you immensely. Good-bye.

DELIA. Good-bye.

FANCY. Good night, Alfred

ALFRED. Good night, Fancy.

FANCY. Come, Ethelbert. (*She takes his arm.*)

ETHELBERT (*to* DELIA *and* ALFRED). Good night.

(FANCY *and* ETHELBERT *go out* L. *A pause.*)

DELIA (*raising her eyebrows*). Well ?

ALFRED. Well ?

DELIA. And what do we do now ?

ALFRED. Would you like some supper ?

DELIA. No, thanks. (*She sits in an armchair by the fire.*) You may order me some champagne if you like.

ALFRED. Willingly.

(ALFRED *rings an electric bell, and then sits facing* DELIA *in the other armchair. They look straight at each other for a time.*)

DELIA (*at length, leaning forward*). Do you know, you 've got the most delightfully wicked eyes.

*The* CURTAIN *falls.*

(*This play should be acted with the most perfect seriousness and polish. It should not be played in a spirit of burlesque. It should be beautifully acted, beautifully costumed, and beautifully staged.*)

PHIPPS

## CHARACTERS

PHIPPS (*a Butler*).

LADY FANNY.

SIR GERALD.

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SCENE.—SIR GERALD'S *library*.

# PHIPPS

SCENE.—*The library of* SIR GERALD'S *London house is a handsome, comfortable place, with very few books in it. There are plenty of easy chairs, rugs, rich hangings, and good water-colours.*

SIR GERALD *and* LADY FANNY *are discovered in the midst of an absorbing, if not a heated, colloquy. Both are about thirty, and extremely good-looking; they wear evening clothes, which cause them to look even less than thirty and more good-looking than ever.* SIR GERALD *is slight in build, and his enemies might call him a bit of a dude. He is a pleasant enough fellow, nevertheless.* LADY FANNY *is gorgeous and shimmering, acute and witty, full of hasty enthusiasms and queer impulses. You like her, but she is a disconcerting woman, all the same. You never know what she is going to say next.* SIR GERALD *is standing in the middle of the room, and* LADY FANNY *is leaning forward in an armchair. Suddenly she rises and sweeps towards* SIR GERALD *with a superb gesture.*

LADY FANNY. Very well then, hit me! Hit me! Hit me, do you hear?

(SIR GERALD *steps forward as if about to strike her, and raises his arm; but instead of hitting her he merely scratches his head in a perplexed way.*)

LADY F. Well, why don't you hit me ? I 'm waiting to be hit. (*She turns her cheek meekly towards him, as if it were a kiss she is expecting and not a blow.*)

SIR GERALD. Er—yes. But I don't think that 's quite the—er—quite the idea.

LADY F. You are reluctant to strike a woman, even if she is your wife ?

SIR G. On the contrary. If I must strike a woman, I prefer that she be my wife. I have no objection to striking you, my dear ; only it is no good doing it in private. In that case, you would be unable to prove my cruelty.

LADY F. The judge ought to take my word for that. Indeed, if the case comes before Sir Frederick Mitchie, I am sure he will, because I know him so well.

SIR G. Sir Frederick is a model of courtesy, and I am certain that he will spare you all the trouble he possibly can ; but I am afraid that he will confirm my view that the law insists upon my being cruel to you in public.

LADY F. It will not be necessary, I trust, for you to strike me at the Opera or the Ritz ?

SIR G. That would be overdoing it. It would betray the amateur. Reticence is the mark of the true artist. But if you wish to get a divorce there must be a witness of some sort when I strike you.

LADY F. Ring for the servants.

SIR G. (*shocked*). The servants ! My dear ! Perhaps I am prudish and even old-fashioned, but the servants——

LADY F. Then *one* of the servants.

SIR G. Which one ?

LADY F. What do you think about Cook ?

SIR G. I *never* think about Cook.

LADY F. I mean as a witness.

SIR G. Oh ! I am afraid that Cook might be inclined to talk.

LADY F. Perhaps you are right. She is naturally a gossip. I suggested her because she has already been married three times, and would probably make an interested and even a sympathetic spectator.

SIR G. Why not your maid ?

LADY F. Robinson ? No. Robinson knows quite enough about me already.

SIR G. There 's that parlour-maid—the one with frizzy hair.

LADY F. She is *much* too young. I should prefer Phipps.

SIR G. Phipps ! My dear Fanny, do you think Phipps would like it ?

LADY F. You might hint to him that we would consider it in his wages.

SIR G. But Phipps is a most respectable man.

LADY F. That is why I should prefer him. He is discreet. I could place myself in his hands without reserve.

SIR G. He is certainly a perfect butler.

LADY F. Will you ring for him, dear ?

SIR G. Willingly.

(SIR GERALD *rings the bell.*)

LADY F. You absolutely decline to give me those pearls ?

SIR G. Absolutely.

LADY F. Very well. As soon as Phipps arrives, you will be good enough to strike me.

SIR G. Certainly. That is the idea, I believe.

LADY F. Yes. I think about here——

(*She chooses a position in the middle of the room, and places* SIR GERALD *conveniently opposite to her.*)

That will do nicely. By the way, Gerald, you won't hurt me, will you ?

SIR G. I am a gentleman, Fanny. I hope that I shall always behave as one, no matter what provocation you offer me.

LADY F. Thank you, Gerald.

SIR G. At the same time, Fanny, I must remind you that although I shall not use actual violence, it will be necessary for you to convey the impression that I am hurting you.

LADY F. Oh, I see. Of course. (*She nods.*) Very well. I promise you I 'll do that. Hush, here he is.

(*They take up their attitudes again.*)

(PHIPPS, *a large, pleasant, discreet man of forty-five, enters and stands by the door.*)

LADY F. (*as before*). Very well then, hit me ! Hit me ! Hit me, do you hear ?

(SIR GERALD *steps forward and strikes* LADY FANNY.)

(*Crying out*) Oh ! oh ! You 've hit me ! You coward !

(LADY FANNY *collapses into the easy chair, sobbing. Her prostration is so complete that she might have been run over by a steam-roller, instead of having been rather delicately*

*slapped upon the shoulder. As she cowers in the chair,* SIR GERALD *steps forward with a threatening air, evidently intending to strike her again.* PHIPPS, *however, rapidly advances, hits* SIR GERALD *a sound blow under the jaw, catches him by the coat collar and flings him aside, tripping him up as he does so in such wise that* SIR GERALD *tumbles on to the floor in a heap.* PHIPPS *stands calmly over the prostrate baronet, in the attitude of a butler awaiting orders.*)

PHIPPS. You rang, my lady.

(LADY FANNY *stares open-mouthed at* PHIPPS.)

Was this what you rang for, my lady? (*He indicates the figure of* SIR GERALD.)

LADY F. (*admiringly*). Phipps! How strong you are! I never knew before that you were so strong.

(SIR GERALD *attempts to get up.*)

PHIPPS. I beg your pardon, sir, but if you don't lie quiet I shall be obliged to knock you down again; with all respect to you, sir.

SIR G. Do you know that you 've nearly broken my jaw?

PHIPPS. I am aware, sir, that I have taken rather a liberty with you, but, as man to man, you will understand that I had no alternative.

SIR G. Confound you! Will you let me get up?

(SIR GERALD *sits on his haunches and scowls up at* PHIPPS.)

PHIPPS. I think it would be better, sir, if you would retain your present position for the moment.

SIR G. (*to* LADY FANNY). This is all your fault, Fanny.

It was your idea to ring for Phipps. (*To* PHIPPS.) Go away, and send Cook here.

PHIPPS. I am sorry, sir, but unless I can have some assurance that you will behave yourself, I cannot trust you with any woman, not even with Cook.

LADY F. But what do you propose to do now, Phipps? We cannot prolong this situation indefinitely.

PHIPPS. I propose to remain here until I have Sir Gerald's word of honour that he will strike neither you, my lady, nor Cook, for whom he asks in his wrath; in the hope, no doubt, that I shall permit him to treat her differently from you because of her inferior station. It is true that Cook's father is a greengrocer in the Edgware Road, and that yours, my lady, is a Duke. But though I am a sound Conservative in politics, I confess that I am unable to consider distinctions of rank where a woman is in distress or danger. In such a case as this I am not a butler, but a man, and as a man I feel that I stand in *loco parentis* both to you, my lady, and to Cook. I represent Mr. Perkins, the greengrocer, as well as his Grace.

LADY F. Phipps! How blind I have been! You have been a perfect butler for three years without my ever suspecting that you were a man.

PHIPPS. Yes, my lady, that is the secret of my success as a butler.

(SIR GERALD *makes an attempt to get up.*)

Do you mind remaining in a semi-recumbent posture, sir? (*To* LADY FANNY.) I am extremely sorry that I have forgotten myself on this occasion, my lady, but I can assure you that I shall try and not let it occur again.

SIR G. For heaven's sake, Fanny, make the fellow let me get up!

LADY F. Oh yes, Phipps, you must allow Sir Gerald to get up now. I undertake that he will behave himself.

PHIPPS. Very good, my lady.

(PHIPPS *assists* SIR GERALD *to rise.*)

I can take your word for it, I am sure.

(PHIPPS *takes a small clothes-brush out of a desk drawer, and brushes* SIR GERALD'S *coat.*)

LADY F. We are very much obliged to you, Phipps —perhaps I should say *I* am very much obliged to you—for the devotion you have shown to-day. It is painful for me to have to tell you that it is mistaken. You have been deceived by appearances.

PHIPPS (*brushing*). Appearances, my lady?

LADY F. Perhaps I should say by my talent for acting. You never saw me play in the theatricals at Tatsworth in the old days, did you?

PHIPPS. I never had that pleasure, my lady.

(PHIPPS *replaces the brush, and stands attentively by* LADY FANNY.)

LADY F. On more than one occasion I was mistaken for a professional.

PHIPPS. A professional actress, my lady?

LADY F. Certainly.

PHIPPS. I am not surprised, my lady; it is surprising how little experience some of our best-known actresses possess.

SIR G. Damn it all, we seem to be drifting into a discussion about the stage now!

LADY F. One moment, Gerald. Phipps, I find, is an

intelligent critic of modern acting. (*To* PHIPPS.) You never realised that when Sir Gerald struck me my emotional outburst was assumed ?

PHIPPS. Not for one moment, my lady.

LADY F. He is an *extremely* intelligent critic of acting ! Sir Gerald did not hurt me, Phipps. At least, not very much.

PHIPPS. I cannot imagine Sir Gerald hurting anybody very much. (*To* SIR GERALD.) I beg your pardon, sir ; I 'm sure you did your best.

SIR G. Don't apologise to me, pray. I can't help feeling that you would be able to discuss my character more freely if you would allow me to retire.

PHIPPS. Not at all, sir. Your presence does not embarrass us in the least.

LADY F. I asked Sir Gerald to strike me.

PHIPPS. Ah, my lady, it is good of you to try and shield Sir Gerald. You 'll be telling me next that you rang for me in order to come and see him strike you.

LADY F. As a matter of fact, that is precisely what did occur. We were in a slight domestic difficulty, and we required your assistance.

SIR G. Look here ! Is there any need to tell all this to Phipps ?

PHIPPS. If I am to be of any use, sir, it will be necessary for you to tell me everything. Otherwise I can hardly give you the full benefit of my advice.

LADY F. I have just had a violent quarrel with Sir Gerald.

PHIPPS. I have observed with regret that you have had a great many quarrels with Sir Gerald of late.

LADY F. This is by far the worst that we have ever had. Sir Gerald complains that I am extravagant.

SIR G. I appeal to you, Phipps, as a married man—you *are* married, aren't you ?

PHIPPS. Not at present, sir. I *was* married. My wife divorced me.

LADY F. Oh, dear ! How was that ?

SIR G. My dear—ought we to ask ?

PHIPPS. There were very excellent reasons for the step.

LADY F. How glad I am that we decided to have you in, Phipps. Your experience will be most useful. I am going to divorce Sir Gerald.

PHIPPS. Oh, my lady ! Reflect. I hold no brief for Sir Gerald, but after all he is your husband.

LADY F. Yes. That is why I am going to divorce him.

PHIPPS. I hope you will think twice before doing so, my lady.

LADY F. We have not shocked you, I trust, Phipps ?

PHIPPS. No, my lady. I have lived with you too long to be easily shocked. But since you have been good enough to take me into your confidence, I beg leave to urge you most strongly to make it up with Sir Gerald.

SIR G. Look here, Phipps. We didn't invite you here to give us a lecture.

PHIPPS. Then, sir, may I ask why you *did* ring for me ?

LADY F. We rang for you to be a witness. From your past experience you must be aware that it is necessary for a woman to prove both adultery and cruelty before she can obtain a divorce.

PHIPPS. Or desertion and cruelty.

LADY F. There is no difference. The one implies the other. *Now* do you understand our difficulty ?

PHIPPS. Forgive me, my lady, if I say that the difficulty does not seem to me an insuperable one.

LADY F. Oh, the desertion or what-do-you-call-it would be easy enough, of course, especially to Sir Gerald. It is the cruelty that presents the difficulty. You see, whatever Sir Gerald has done, he has never made a practice of hitting me.

SIR G. I hope I know where to draw the line.

LADY F. We were expecting that you would understand everything, and would help to make things all so easy for us. Phipps, am I to be disappointed in you, after all ?

PHIPPS. No, my lady. That shall never be. (*To* SIR GERALD.) You and her ladyship have definitely decided to separate ?

SIR G. Yes.

PHIPPS. Nothing I can say will prevent you ?

SIR G. Nothing.

LADY F. Nothing.

PHIPPS. There is—excuse me—no other lady ?

SIR G. Certainly not. I can't afford to keep her ladyship, let alone anybody else.

LADY F. You shall not have to reproach me with that much longer.

PHIPPS. Then may I point out that you have selected a most unpleasant mode of accomplishing your object. To divorce Sir Gerald it will be necessary for you to transact a lot of cumbersome legal business, to appear in court and have your

photograph in the papers, and generally to go through a great deal of disagreeable publicity.

LADY F. All that is quite true, but I don't see how it can be avoided.

PHIPPS. Quite easily, my lady.

LADY F. How ?

PHIPPS. By letting Sir Gerald divorce you.

LADY F. Divorce me! But I have given him no reason to do so.

PHIPPS. Ah, my lady, don't let a little thing like that stand in the way.

SIR G. Eh ?

PHIPPS. It is all so simple. You have only to order Robinson to pack for you, to select a congenial companion, and to leave the country. Sir Gerald does the rest. It is as easy as taking a Kodak photograph.

LADY F. Really, Phipps, there is something in what you say. Gerald, what do you think ?

SIR G. Well—it 's an idea.

(*They consider the matter for a moment.*)

LADY F. There is only one thing troubling me. The choice of the — what did you call him, Phipps ?

PHIPPS. The congenial companion, my lady.

LADY F. Yes. The congenial companion ! What a charming way of putting it.

PHIPPS. If you would permit me to suggest a name, my lady—the Earl of Skye——

LADY F. Tony ? I 'm very fond of Tony. (*She considers.*) H'm ! No, Phipps, Lord Skye is going to Norway salmon-fishing on Saturday. We could hardly expect him to put off his trip

just to oblige us in this trifling matter. Gerald! Can't you think of some one?

SIR G. What about Harry Roughwood?

LADY F. No go! He 's down with measles.

SIR G. Ow! Bad luck. (*He scratches his head.*) I dunno *who* we could get.

LADY F. It 's too bad of you, Gerald. You *are* stupid.

(*They all reflect with the utmost earnestness.*)

PHIPPS. I wonder, my lady, if in this emergency you would allow me to make another suggestion?

LADY F. Of course, Phipps. Have you thought of some other man?

PHIPPS. I have, my lady.

LADY F. But is he available? He may have some other engagement.

PHIPPS. Whether he is available depends upon you and Sir Gerald, my lady.

LADY F. Why! Who is he?

PHIPPS. I was referring to myself, my lady.

LADY F. You!

SIR G. You!

(*There is a pause.*)

LADY F. Oh, but, Phipps, we could hardly expect you to undertake a responsibility of this sort, especially at your present wages.

PHIPPS. It is true, my lady, that you have only engaged me as your butler, but seeing that you are placed in a difficulty, I should be perfectly happy to make myself useful in any capacity.

SIR G. It 's jolly good of you, Phipps, it is indeed; but we couldn't think of giving you so much trouble.

PHIPPS. No trouble at all, Sir Gerald. On the contrary, it would be a pleasure.

SIR G. Oh ! would it ?

LADY F. This is quite an idea. I 'm sure, Gerald, that you would prefer a nice respectable man like Phipps to go with me. We must think it over thoroughly. Sit down, Phipps.

PHIPPS. If it 's all the same to you, my lady, I should feel more comfortable standing.

LADY F. I insist. Sit here by me.

(LADY FANNY *crosses to a settee, and makes room for* PHIPPS *on it by her side.* PHIPPS *unwillingly takes the seat indicated.*)

LADY F. You said it would be a pleasure. What did you mean by that ?

PHIPPS. My lady, now that I know that you and Sir Gerald are estranged, I can speak freely. For the past three years I have cherished an ardent affection for your ladyship.

SIR G. (*startled*). Eh ! What 's that ?

LADY F. Phipps ! Do you really mean it ?

PHIPPS. I know it is a great liberty, my lady, to entertain such sentiments towards you, but even a butler is capable of a human attachment ; and under the circumstances I hope that you will be inclined to overlook it this time.

LADY F. And you have managed to conceal your feelings all these years ?

PHIPPS. It has been a struggle, my lady. I have been torn between conflicting emotions. My duty seemed to be to give you a month's notice, but then came the reflection that if I did so I should never see you again.

LADY F. My poor Phipps! My heart bleeds for you. What devotion!

PHIPPS. You do not mind, my lady?

LADY F. I have never been loved like this before. It is a new sensation. Tell me more about yourself. Why did your wife divorce you?

PHIPPS. Well, my lady——

SIR G. (*who has been roaming about behind the settee in some agitation of mind*). I say, I 'm afraid I 'm in the way here.

PHIPPS. Not at all, sir.

SIR G. I 'll go into another room if I am disturbing you.

PHIPPS. Believe me, sir, I had clean forgotten you were there.

LADY F. Be quiet, Gerald, I don't mind you stopping here if you won't talk. Go on, Phipps. What is it that you propose?

PHIPPS. That instead of divorcing Sir Gerald, you adopt the far easier course of going away with me and allowing Sir Gerald to divorce you. That would be much pleasanter for all parties. I should never have dared to suggest such a thing, if it were not that your ladyship and Sir Gerald have given each other notice as it were; leaving you, so to speak, temporarily without a place. I can give you no diamonds, no pearls, my lady. All I can offer is the sincere and pent-up devotion of a man of forty-five, in good health and preservation. Could you bring yourself to accept it, my lady?

LADY F. (*closing her eyes in rapture*). Oh, this is wonderful! Gerald, you never speak to me like this.

PHIPPS. You could hardly expect him to do so, my lady, seeing that you are his wife.

LADY F. *Dare* I go with you? What would it be like to love a man for himself alone? (*Looking at him earnestly.*) Phipps—you fascinate me—strangely.

SIR G. May I ask what you propose to live on? Will Phipps support you on the emoluments he gains as butler, or do you yourself intend to take up a position as lady's maid?

PHIPPS. There you touch the main difficulty. I fear that her ladyship will find herself in rather poor circumstances for a time, unless you, sir, should think of making her a settlement.

SIR G. I 'm damned if I 'll make her a settlement.

LADY F. Gerald, there is no need to get angry, even if you *are* ashamed of being mean.

SIR G. I 'm not mean.

LADY F. Oh yes, you are. First you refuse to buy me the pearls, and now you refuse to make us a settlement. I call it *worse* than mean. You are a perfect dog in the manger.

SIR G. I didn't refuse to buy you the pearls. I said I couldn't afford to buy them unless I sold Cleveleys.

LADY F. That comes to much the same thing as refusing, doesn't it?

PHIPPS. My lady, I am waiting for your answer.

SIR G. (*eagerly*). Hold on a bit. One moment, please, Phipps.

PHIPPS (*bowing*). I beg pardon, sir. (*He steps back a pace.*)

SIR G. Look here, Fanny. If I sell Cleveleys, and

buy you the pearls, will you promise not to ask me for anything else for a whole year ?

LADY F. A year is too long. I might consider six months.

SIR G. Six months. (*He looks at* PHIPPS *and reflects.*)

(PHIPPS, *under the impression that he may now speak, takes a step forward.* SIR GERALD *intercepts him quickly.*)

All right. Six months.

LADY F. And you 'll buy me the pearls ? That 's a promise.

SIR G. Yes.

LADY F. Then there will be no need for us to get divorced at all, will there ?

PHIPPS (*anxiously*). My lady——

LADY F. Oh yes, Phipps. I am sorry to disappoint you, Phipps.

PHIPPS. You have decided to remain with Sir Gerald, my lady ?

LADY F. For the present. It will be so much less trouble, after all. But we need not regret the circumstance which caused us to invite your co-operation. It has enabled us to become more closely acquainted than I had thought possible. I am intensely obliged to you for all your kindness. You see how valuable your advice has proved. I hope we shall have the benefit of it on many future occasions.

PHIPPS. No, my lady.

SIR G. No ?

PHIPPS. Never again, my lady.

LADY F. Oh, but why not, Phipps ?

PHIPPS. I regret, my lady, that I cannot remain any longer in your service.

LADY F. But why ? To leave us just when we were beginning to know each other more intimately !

PHIPPS. That is just it, my lady. I have been so perfect a butler to you for three years, that you never suspected that I was a man. Now you know that I am a man, I shall never be a perfect butler to you again. I give you a month's notice, my lady.

(PHIPPS *bows and goes out of the room.*)

SIR G. (*wiping his brow in relief*). What a man !

LADY F. Oh, Gerald ! If only you would try to be more like him.

(*The curtain falls quickly, leaving* SIR GERALD *staring at* LADY FANNY *in surprise.*)

*The* CURTAIN *falls.*

# DRAMATIC CRITICISMS

# 'ROSMERSHOLM'

That *Rosmersholm* is a fine stage play there can be no doubt. The performance at the Prince's Theatre last week would confirm the opinion of one who had judged as much merely from the perusal of the text —even though Mr. Leigh Lovel's company gave a performance which was not exactly first-rate, and which bore frequent traces of insufficient preparation. To Ibsen, of course, 'the play 's the thing' first of all. It is the thing 'wherein to catch the conscience of the king' too, but not at the expense of the play as a play. Works like *When We Dead Awaken* or even *The Master Builder,* written in the latter days of the old observer, when the mists were closing around him and he saw things which some of us may hardly recapture—works like these perhaps are not so suitably conceived for stage representation; but in *Rosmersholm* the relations of one character to another do not pass the limits of what is entirely human, and are therefore the more moving and poignant. Even the political background of *Rosmersholm*—a vivid enough piece of painting, inspired by a definite set of circumstances—is suggestive of what one has seen in England—especially in the country—of political virulence and the bitterness of beaten parties.

One feels that as a rule the reactionaries, with

whom Ibsen did not sympathise, do not get the fairest chance of giving a good account of themselves. Kroll, like his near relation Pastor Manders, in *Ghosts*, is perfectly sincere, and has a perfectly good case of his own, but his position appears to be excessively narrow and illiberal. He starts heavily handicapped, as it were, and it is no wonder if the scratch players beat him; he has not the advantages that Morell has in *Candida*—Morell to whom Mr. Shaw, one might say, even concedes fifteen, and whom he yet fairly and squarely thrashes in three straight sets. Of Rosmer, and the work that such as he may do, Ibsen himself has spoken when explaining his view of the necessity for introducing an aristocratic strain into the life of a truly democratic state. ' I am thinking,' he said, ' not of birth nor of money nor even of intellect, but of the nobility which grows out of character. It is character alone which can make us free.' Rosmer, however, does not strike one as being a man who could be a force at any time or in any circumstances. The Rosmersholm influence on the countryside would count for something, but intelligent people would hardly be moved by that alone. When a man has to have his driving force supplied, like a mill-owner who rents his engine power—as Rebecca West supplies Rosmer's—the man is hardly the most suitable example for a democracy destined to become ' noble men by purifying their wills and freeing their minds *by their own strength*.' One has heard it pointed out as a fault in *Rosmersholm* that the first half of the play is rather a mystery; that, for instance, we are not able to form any definite conception of what Rebecca West really is. Certainly

to English eyes the household arrangements are unnatural. One would have thought that Rosmer would be peculiarly sensitive to the danger of criticism from people with coarse souls and ignoble eyes; and again—a small matter perhaps—one would have expected to find women like Rebecca and Madame Helseth maintaining a sort of armed truce rather than an *entente cordiale*. To return to the charge of preliminary indefiniteness, it should be noted that Ibsen's method was to let his characters reveal their inner and outer selves gradually; it was part of the drama, and a very absorbing part too. And when you have the character fully revealed at last you will see that earlier touches, apparently irrelevant or uncertain, fall into their places in an ordered line.

Mr. Lovel possesses a personality that should go to make a very fair Rosmer, but his mechanical style and the hardness and inflexibility of his voice became monotonous, and the dead level upon which he played was depressing in the end. The Rector Kroll of Mr. Jules Shaw was earnest enough, but it was marred by an uncomfortable, exaggerated fussiness. We were grateful for the humanness and unstudied effect of this quality, but it was apparently caused by insufficient acquaintance with his part, and it touched upon the comic once or twice in the wrong place. It is easy to make a big mistake about Miss Octavia Kenmore's Rebecca West. She is an actress not temperamentally adapted for the part, but there was often great intelligence and skill in her handling of the character. In her acceptance of the responsibility for the wife's death, how-

ever, Miss Kenmore was the repentant woman confessing a sin remorsefully. Surely Rebecca is rather doing a fine thing in the calmness of resolution. She is restoring to Rosmer his happy innocence, and she must feel there is a certain triumphant nobility in the untheatrical self-sacrifice. In the fourth act, when Rebecca offers, still more nobly, the final proof which Rosmer demands, Miss Kenmore, we thought, was nearer the right note. Here both she and Mr. Lovel succeeded in creating a distinct tragic atmosphere, and one saw them go out into the darkness with the conviction that they were to do justice upon themselves, that the dead wife was calling them out into the mill-race. We had, indeed, something like a glimpse of the white horses of Rosmersholm.

# THE RETURN OF 'PETER PAN'

'LET 's pretend,' said Harold in Mr. Kenneth Grahame's charming book *The Golden Age*, 'that we 're Cavaliers and Roundheads; and *you* be a Roundhead.' 'Let 's pretend' is what Mr. Barrie is saying all through *Peter Pan*. He is saying it not to his characters only, but also to his audience; and it is because he has been able to make us all surrender to his suggestion that the play has been so extraordinarily successful. Away from Mr. Barrie's spell we are perfectly aware that no grown-up, except Mr. G. K. Chesterton, really does believe in fairies; but in the theatre we clap our hands at Peter's appeal as an outward and visible sign of our surrender. It was truly ingenious of Mr. Barrie to take advantage, in such a novel way, of that inclination for romance, that desire to be 'carried out of oneself,' as the phrase is, which even the sternest moralist of a critic has concealed somewhere in his stony breast. To touch the exact spot was the problem; and where all the purple empires of musical comedy and 'romantic' drama have failed Mr. Barrie has succeeded, and by the simplest means. Merely by appealing to that instinct which makes us unwilling to destroy letters of long ago, which makes us hoard piles of rubbish without any value except that of old association. 'For Auld Lang

Syne' is the formula of Mr. Barrie's native land. In every masculine heart there is a chord that once never failed 'to thrill responsive to such words as eave, trap-door, sliding-panel, bullion, or Spanish dollars'; in every feminine heart (oh, artful Mr. Barrie!) there was once a wistful longing for a doll with a volition of its own, a doll that would say something more than 'Papa' or 'Mama' when you pulled a string. Mr. Barrie has simply touched those old chords and recalled those old longings, and we are grateful enough to follow him wheresoever he cares to lead us. Those who go away and declare afterwards that the pirates and the Indians are exquisite burlesques are weak-kneed people who are ashamed to admit the real reason of their enjoyment, and who feel that they must account for their pleasure in a matter of fact way that will be understood on the boards of the Royal Exchange. The true *Peter Pan* enthusiast knows it for a fact pirates have danced hornpipes ever since the days of Sir Henry Morgan; he knows, he knew as soon as he could read, that Redskins invariably grunt with the 'Hugh!' of Fenimore Cooper, and that they detect the approach of a foe by applying their ears to the ground. He recognises that these characters are true to type, and welcomes them as old friends; for Mr. Barrie, with his usual *flair* for the correct thing, has been content to rely, by kind permission of Robert Louis Stevenson, upon

> Kingston and Ballantyne the brave,
> And Cooper of the wood and wave.

That his calculation is a just one we can affirm by

recalling the thrill of delight with which in the Home under the Ground and the House on the Tree Tops we recognised the cave and the tree-dwelling out of *The Swiss Family Robinson*. If we seem to have laid too much stress upon these old gems, and to have neglected the rich new gold of fancy in which they are set, it is because we think the peculiar use of them is a stroke of genius which differentiates *Peter Pan* not only from any other play, but also from any other of Mr. Barrie's plays. It is, of course, the company from the Duke of York's Theatre that is visiting Manchester this week, and most of the parts are filled by the same actors as last year. There is a new Wendy, however, and a new Slightly (Mr. A. W. Baskcomb), who is rather less aggressive and uncouth than his predecessor, though his quiet, natural method is no less effective. Miss Gertrude Lang acts Wendy excellently, though one cannot help having an affectionate regard for little Miss Ella Q. May, who was the actual thing. Miss Lang follows closely the lines that Miss Hilda Trevelyan marked out; she sticks to what will be handed down as the accepted Wendy tradition. And indeed it could not be bettered, only adult actresses will always have more or less of a struggle to get down to the required degree of childishness, and run the risk of overshooting their mark. If there was a hint of this danger in Miss Lang's performance it was only a slight hint, and she could probably justify everything she does by a reference to Miss Trevelyan. We are hoping to have the luck some day to see a really boyish Peter Pan, but meanwhile Miss Pauline Chase is good enough to give extreme

pleasure; and it must be conceded that, after all, Miss Chase makes Peter a very manly little girl. Mr. Robb Harwood as the Pirate Captain might cause us to forget Mr. Lionel Mackinder if he would only dance as divinely. During the summer Mr. Barrie generally devises some new incident to throw in by way of overweight; this time there is a lovely war-dance for the Redskins, and Tiger Lily performs a *pas seul*, symbolic, it is to be supposed, of scalpings and burnings at the stake.

A word about the music. A comparative barbarian in musical matters approaches the subject gingerly, but it is safe to say that Mr. John Crook, the composer, has entered thoroughly into Mr. Barrie's spirit. He has the most admirable sense of what is fitting. When one hears the 'Yo-ho' chorus, for instance, one knows that the pirates are as inevitable as cold lamb in a Welsh hotel. 'Pirates!' leaps to the lips like Mrs. Theodore Wright's 'Fiddles, George!' in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*.

# MR. MAUGHAM'S 'SMITH'

Mr. Frohman, who had set his face sternly against Sunday performances at his theatres in New York, has begun to hedge, it appears, and to wonder whether it may not be right to act plays on Sunday after all, provided they be plays of sound moral tendencies. He has mentioned, they say, two such plays as possible starters, and one of them is Mr. Somerset Maugham's *Smith*. The other is Mr. Galsworthy's *Justice*. This stroke of humour on Mr. Frohman's part is probably quite unconscious, and Mr. Maugham no doubt enjoys the joke as much as anybody.

And why do we consider it a stroke of humour to couple these two plays ? Very likely Mr. Maugham, if he chooses, is as well qualified as Mr. Galsworthy to read us a moral lesson ; the simple fact is that in *Smith* he has not so chosen. Having sown his true genuine oats in *The Man of Honour* and certain novels, he has turned gaily to the more congenial task of sowing his wild oats, and he finds, no doubt, that they yield the better crop. Mr. Maugham has observed that a man likes, in the familiar but handy phrase, to compound for sins he is inclined to by damning those he has no mind to. It would never do to write a play really disturbing, like *Ghosts*, to the private conscience, or, like *Justice*, to the public conscience. The prudent author-moralist hits out

like anything, and takes good care to dodge the tender spots. 'Trespassers will be prosecuted' is the motto for Mr. Maugham's morality; he keeps to the beaten track, the track that Mr. Sutro trod before him, and found to lead to Jericho. It is only fair, indeed, to remember that it was Mr. Sutro who knocked the first hole in Jericho's walls, and that Mr. Maugham's play is, as one might say, a case of once more unto the breach, dear friends.

The modern smart dramatist looks at Society, and sees at once what is wrong. There are not enough babies. This is the message to be delivered to Society, and naturally it needs a strong man to deliver it with satisfactory emphasis. Now all the strong men come from the colonies, as the nuts come from Brazil, and so Mr. Maugham's hero comes from Rhodesia, which is as good a place as anywhere. From the moment he descends upon London, with a breezy air and a tweed travelling-suit, he positively radiates healthy influence in the best Third Floor Back manner. Incidentally he deals—the honest Rhodesian—with that delicate question at which we have hinted above; and in his set, burning periods we seem to catch the echo of the voice that shook the topmost towers of Jericho. The Rhodesian has come home for a wife, but amongst these bridge-playing, worthless ones there can be no fit wife for him. The only decent woman in the house is Smith, the parlour-maid, and so, not having the entrée to any other household apparently, he follows the line of least resistance and proposes to her. It is at this point that Mr. Maugham's observation of servants coincides with Mr. Barrie's, Mr.

Shaw's, and even Mr. Jerome's. Too easily do all these authors assume that servants always 'know their places,' and object, on philosophic grounds, to marrying above them. Of course we know well that Smith will not go on refusing the Rhodesian to the end of the chapter, but it is interesting to find her putting up quite a good fight against him on the well-ascertained principles.

The play is very smartly acted this week at the Prince's. Every member of the cast really deserves favourable mention, for there was not a weak spot anywhere. Mr. Robert Minster handled the Rhodesian tactfully, and made him much less of a prig than one might have expected. Mr. Douglas Greet was very clever as an Algy, and Miss Ethel Hodgkins gave quite a brilliant, hard performance as a bridge-playing wife. Smith was acted by Miss Cicely Stuckey, who did it very nicely indeed. To tell the truth you cannot grow enthusiastic about the acting in Mr. Maugham's plays, because you never feel that the people are real. They entertain you and fade away, leaving you cold, unmoved, and in quite a good humour.

## 'LITTLE HANS ANDERSEN'

THERE is nobody in the whole world who knows so many stories as Ole-Luk-Oie. He can tell capital histories. You remember Ole-Luk-Oie, of course, the old gentleman with the umbrella which he opens over the good children when they are asleep in bed, so that they dream all night the most glorious stories. Ole-Luk-Oie is a sort of chorus to the play which is going to fill the Gaiety Theatre each afternoon for the next weeks; he is the machinery who works the changes and moves the scenes along; he is there to point the moral and adorn the tale. But there is none of your conscientious Sandford and Merton sermonising. Hans Andersen would have none of that. He was content to let his simple lessons of love and humility lie implicit in the tales; they were there in a greater or less degree, but he was out for story-telling, not for schoolmastering. And, wisely, Mr. Basil Hood has chosen his themes amongst the least improving stories, so we will not grudge old Ole-Luk-Oie his moral tag or two about selfishness; we will forget all about that uncomfortable trick of his—as he soon does himself—and will proceed to enjoy ourselves. First, however, we must ask why Ole-Luk-Oie is dressed just like John Bull. Says Hans Andersen, 'He is well dressed, his coat is of silk, but it is impossible to say of what

colour, for it shines red, green, and blue, according as he turns.' A little difficult to manage, perhaps, but John Bull is not a bit like it. But there is no other fault to be found with Mr. A. T. Gullifer, who was just the sort of kind, hearty old gentleman that any child would be glad to hear stories from in the middle of the night. And who is the little boy to whom Ole-Luk-Oie shows the stories in the play? Why, that is the stroke of genius about it; the little boy is Hans Christian Andersen himself. Mr. Lenton Murray plays the part, and we fell in love with him from the moment he rose at Ole-Luk-Oie's bidding, dressed himself quickly, 'like children do in dreams,' and stole down the stairs into the living-room, a tiny child, wondering. That is what he did all the time; he wondered. He seemed to be thinking of all the stories he was going to write when he grew up; and when he acted with the characters he never seemed one of them, because he was always studying the marvellous creatures with eyes wide open, noting their eccentricities. And once he did not even act at all, but sat on a stool at the side of the stage, like Christopher Sly, and watched everything, wondering all the time. That was when we liked him best of all. This, then, is the idea that gives the piece unity, that binds it together; Ole-Luk-Oie takes little Hans through it all and shows him everything.

And what are the stories that Hans sees? The first part is in the palace of the Emperor who loved new clothes (where Hans becomes page-boy), and mixed up with this monarch is the story of the Princess who loved the Prince who pretended to be

a swine-herd, and who possessed a magic pipe which made everybody dance to its strains. Yes, everybody; the Emperor himself, the old doubled-up Lord Chamberlain, the Royal footman (who was very haughty), the Royal butler, and the cooks and the housemaids and the courtiers; they all danced as if there were nothing else in the world worth doing but dance—and when you come to think of it perhaps they were right. In the second part the stories are kept apart a little more. Here is the mermaid who became mortal for love of the Prince whom she had saved from the wreck. But when the Prince marries the Princess, the Seamaid doesn't become sea-foam on his marriage morning. No, she is placed on the shore to warn mariners when the wicked Sea Witch tries to lure them to destruction, and when the curtain goes up at the end of the scene you see her standing in the dusk like a rock, with a bright light in her outstretched hand. It is a charming effect that Mr. Barrie might have been proud to invent. Miss Winifred Delivanti is the Seamaid, and she plays her pathetic little part beautifully. Then there is—almost complete—that splendid story about the hollow tree into which the soldier climbed to fetch the tinder-box for the witch, and there are the three dogs which appeared when the tinder-box was rubbed, and the eyes of the first dog are white, and of the second red, and of the third green. The witch is perfectly wonderful, with black sugar-loaf hat, nut-cracker face, and broomstick; there is no mistaking this witch. Mr. Rudolph Lewis was splendidly vigorous; he seemed to ride in on the whirlwind, and we expected

him to turn into a black cat at any moment. But he didn't. These are the stories, and through them all dances little Karen, the selfish child who thought only of herself, and wore the red shoes to her confirmation. Karen had to dance always, you remember, for the red shoes carried her on ; she danced into the dark woods, over thorn, over brier, all through the world—and she dances through the play, too. But —here is an ingenious bit of blending with quite another story—she has to dance until she finds the loveliest rose in all the world, and what do you think that is ? Why, the Christmas rose, the rose that blossomed upon the Cross ; and Karen dances always, looking for it. And actually Miss Enid Meek is Karen, an old friend at the Gaiety, where she has played little girls before. But she has never danced before, and none of us knew she was so gifted as she turns out to be.

There is a little honest knockabout comedy, and Mr. Huntly Gifford, as the Emperor, is responsible for most of this. It is on rather obvious lines, as when he kneels upon the duck to carve it, but he manages to be very funny. And we must not forget Mr. Will Hindson and Mr. Christmas Grose (happy name) as the Wooden Soldiers with clockwork in their tummies. They acted most mechanically, and were not a bit like human beings, and it is the first time we have been able to praise actors by saying that about them. We have kept the best until the last. It is Miss Ellaline Mills, the tiny dancer. The first time she appears she is carried on wrapped up in tissue-paper, for she is a doll, a birthday present for the Princess. The second time she turns up

without any excuse, but we are only too pleased to have her on any terms. She is a miniature Genée. She seems almost too tiny to stand up, yet the dear little thing floats exquisitely about the stage like a bubble, and her toes are as delicate as a kitten's paws. The grace of her little arms and of her free spontaneous poses is amazing. She is the very cream of childish charm. Remember to applaud her very heartily, because if you do she will come on and dance again for you. And, with Hans, she will throw you crackers at the end of the play.

Well, we have praised the whole thing very considerably, and when it is running quite smoothly (there were hitches) it will be a delightful entertainment. But there was one side of the Hans Andersen stories that was quite missing, except for a hint in the very short first scene, and that is the peasant life Andersen knew and loved. He told us such a lot about the dumb lives lived in the heart of the Jutland forests, he drew in a few simple words the firwoods and the heaths, the lakes and the eel-weirs and the solitary cottages of his peaceful Northland. His peasants were so near the soil that when they were silent and the Things spoke instead—the Fir-tree or the Wind—the transition was natural and imperceptible. There are no peasants in Mr. Basil Hood's play, and the only Things that speak are the Wooden Soldiers. It has been left for Maurice Maeterlinck to put Hans Andersen completely on the stage, and he has done it in *The Blue Bird*. There you will find no fancy, no stroke of poetry, no touch of gentle philosophy, that you cannot match a score of times in the tales of Hans Christian Andersen.

# ESSAYS AND SKETCHES

# MR. OVENS

Mr. Ovens died on Saturday, and they are burying him this afternoon. As I draw aside the blind, which is lowered sympathetically, like all the other blinds in the road, I can see the hearse standing at the gate, and the mourning coaches drawn up behind it. I can see, too, the group of black-garbed mourners in the garden next to mine, and since the window is open I can hear what they are saying. I gather that a point of precedence is being argued. Mrs. Will Ovens maintains her right to ride in the first coach because she is the widow of the eldest son, and because Mr. Ovens was living with her when he died. Mr. Walter, the elder surviving son, and his wife think that *they* should ride in the first coach; while Mr. Tom, the bachelor, thinks that it should be occupied by himself and Mr. Walter alone, and that the women should follow in the second coach.

I have always been interested in Mr. Ovens, and his death on Saturday almost shocked me, for only two days before I had met him on his way to the seat behind the lifeboat-house, where he was accustomed to rest on fine mornings. You would see him coming slowly along the Parade, leaning heavily on his stick; stopping short every now and then to stare wistfully out to sea. Behind the big spectacles his weak, pale-blue eyes seemed always to be

looking for something very far away, past the horizon. I wonder what Mr. Ovens was looking for; perhaps he has found it now. He would talk to himself in an undertone a good deal, and though it was impossible to catch what he was saying, I always suspected him of a dim hopelessness in his attitude to the world and of a disparaging view of its inhabitants.

When I first saw Mr. Ovens he was sitting in the washhouse attached to the back of his dwelling. My back windows command a view of his yard, and I saw him sitting in the washhouse frequently, reading. My maid, Grace, who is acquainted with the affairs of all the neighbours, because the back garden walls are low, and gossiping is therefore easy, told me that he sat in the washhouse because there was no other place he could sit in and be out of the way. It appeared that Mrs. Will, his daughter-in-law, took lodgers, or 'visitors' as they are called in the town, and during the season business was so good that all the living-rooms were let, and the family had to take their meals in the kitchen. But there was no room in the kitchen for Mr. Ovens to sit and read. He got in the way of the cooking, so on wet days, when he couldn't go to the seat behind the lifeboat-house, he went into the washhouse. I don't know what he would have done on a washing day; fortunately Mrs. Will was too busy to wash at home, and sent all her things to the laundry. I can imagine Mrs. Will, saucepan in hand, stumbling over poor Mr. Ovens's shins and saying sharply, 'Now, father, I can't do with you in here; I 'm too busy.' She is always busy; she is a pushing, energetic woman. On one occasion, when her house was very full, she

did me the honour to ask me to let her a bedroom in my house to accommodate the overflow of visitors. She offered me a guinea for the week, but I did not feel disposed to oblige her. On the other hand, I would have loved to let old Mr. Ovens have the use of my study for nothing, so that he could sit comfortably and read his book. The difficulty was that I did not know Mr. Ovens. More than once I approached him on the Parade when he was looking out to sea for that something, but I never quite knew how to begin. Once I got as far as 'I think we 're neighbours—' Mr. Ovens withdrew his eyes from the horizon and fixed them questioningly on me, and then, seeing that I was not the thing he had been looking for, he slowly walked on past me towards the lifeboat-house.

I dare say there was plenty of room at Mr. Walter's, but I don't think Mrs. Walter cared to be bothered with the old gentleman. Mr. Tom was a bachelor, and lived in 'diggings'; the two daughters took visitors, and were as busy making money as Mrs. Will was. I could never make out why Mr. Ovens lived with Mrs. Will, who was only the widow of his son, not a blood relation. Grace, however, cleared up the matter by informing me that the house was Mr. Ovens's, and that it was Mrs. Will who lived with her father-in-law; in other words, that there was not room for him in his own house when the visitors were there. When he was taken ill, I asked Grace if she could tell me which was his bedroom, so that I could look at the window at night and see if the lights were moving. 'He hasn't got a bedroom exactly,' she replied; 'they put a bed in the

top landing with a screen across, and he sleeps there.'

It was Mrs. Will herself who told me he was dead. I met her coming out of the gate late on Saturday evening. 'It couldn't have happened worse,' she said, 'the house full of visitors. I suppose I ought to ask them to go, but I can't turn them out till after the week-end.' I wanted to ask her whether Mr. Ovens had died on the top landing, and whether he was now fulfilling his last vigil in the washhouse, but I forbore.

'I 'm going now to get some white lilies to put on him,' she added. 'I shall go down to the market; they 'll be cheaper there than in the shops.'

. . . . . .

They have settled that question of precedence outside in the next garden now. Mrs. Will rides in the first coach with Mr. and Mrs. Walter. Mr. Tom and his sisters ride in the second coach.

# OUT OF THE SEASON

The promenade lay like a curved sword with the light on it. The shimmer of steel gleamed from the wet asphalt as the curtain of cloud parted from the horizon, and let a little paleness pass across the stretch of sea. Mist hung above the sea like steam, in patches; and from where the sun should have shown the rain pattered undecidedly, like the half-hearted fusillade of beaten sharpshooters. The drops lashed impudently the faces of great piles of pleasure palaces, which seemed to stare blankly from a thousand eyes as they meekly awaited the golden days when the crush of counties would flow through their corridors like life-blood, warming and awakening them to other than mute suffering. The sea front, noble in the length and regularity of its sweep, where for joyous miles thousands jostle in the sunshine, was populous only with a grove of tramway standards; and along the shining rails, at long intervals, slid furtively an electric car, almost the only living thing upon that vast expanse.

The footfall of the Major, walking solitary upon the pier, resounded from the hollow boarding indecently, like the tread of one desecrating some sacred place hallowed by the silence of centuries. He turned his back on the depressing prospect, and came in to lunch with the promptness of one to

whom a meal-time is a milestone: he was not inordinately greedy, but lunch promised definite occupation for half an hour. He was a mild man, apologetic with waiters; accustomed to eat slowly and to spend a long time at table, savouring his soup delicately in order to ascertain the exact quantity of salt and pepper that it would be necessary to add, pouring out his stout with care so that the froth should not swell suddenly over the glass rim and stain the snowy whiteness of the cloth. He took pleasure in such minute details, for they were definitely useful, not merely expedients to while away the time. There was a stranger at the table which he had hitherto shared with no one; a pleasant little sharp old gentleman with a brown healthy face. Round his grey steadfast eyes were innumerable crow's-feet, and his high brown forehead was ruled across with wrinkles like music paper. For ten minutes neither of them spoke, but each privately observed the other, his dress, and his manner of eating. Then the Major, as the oldest resident in the hotel, passed the salt and the old gentleman passed the butter, these small politenesses evoking disproportionate gratitude and thanks. The Major ordered his stout, but the old gentleman declined the services of the wine waiter.

'I never take anything,' he explained with a smile, bobbing his head at his companion.

'No?' said the Major, bending towards him gratefully.

'Not that I disapprove. I don't find it suits me.'

'It doesn't suit some people,' the Major said courteously, and then, after a dreadful pause, 'Are you stopping long, sir?'

'For a day or two only; I'm looking round.' He drank water and wiped his mouth preeisely. 'I should like to buy a house if I eould find a plaee to suit me.'

Strange to say, the Major was in mueh the same situation. Sinee he had left the army he had spent his life trying to find a plaee to suit him; he had not, as he liked to put it, a roof over his head. He helped himself nervously from the entrée dish whieh was presented to him, and said, 'You are married, sir, probably?' Strangers are like people in a play on the stage; one will never see them again, but they may unburden themselves of intimaeies with perfeet propriety.

'No,' said the old gentleman with great gravity, 'I am unmarried'; and then, half jestingly, 'but if I had to live my life again, I might lay it out differently.'

They both laughed heartily, as if at the best joke in the world. The old gentleman, it turned out, had retired from business four years ago, and sinee then had been visiting one plaee after another in seareh of a home. 'The ideal plaee is so hard to find,' he eomplained; 'in faet, I doubt whether there *is* an ideal plaee.' The Major had thoughts of travelling round the world—'going to have a look at some of our eolonial eousins,' he called it. He was embarrassed by the profusion of steamship advertisements and prospeetuses, but as soon as he eould seleet a route and make eertain of a comfortable ship he would think about starting. 'Makes a big differenee,' he said sagely, 'the sort of boat you 're in.'

In the afternoon the Major took a solitary walk along the cliffs, and the old gentleman went out alone to view the town and inadvertently to encounter the sanitary alterations at the Grand Hotel, the asphalting operations on the promenade, and the crane and heap of serap-iron which marked the improvements at the entrance to the pier. They smiled at each other as they sat down to dinner, and they discussed current politics diplomatically, feeling about vaguely for each other's susceptibilities. Each so modified his real opinions that at the end of it all the old gentleman cried, 'My dear sir, you 're the first British officer I 've met who has agreed with me!' As a matter of fact he was a red-hot Radical and the Major was a convinced Unionist, and if they had been friends they would have quarrelled like dogs.

A play made out of one of Dumas's tales was being acted at the theatre, and both expressed a wish to see it. 'Dumas,' said the old gentleman—'he wrote some good books. *Monte Cristo.* Edmond Dantès, the Château d'If . . . very fine . . . very well conceived.' The Major thought there might be some fighting—he had never seen any whilst in the service—and after dinner they both went to the theatre. The old gentleman sat in the stalls and the Major in the dress circle, and they did not meet in the bar because the one abstained and the other had been forbidden by the doctor to drink except at meals. The Dumas, dramatised by an obscure Englishman, proved a failure. The leading lady was the only person on the stage who could act, and she was too fat. The others bawled. But both gentlemen sat

it out to the end, because there was nothing else to do but go to bed.

Across the patch of light diffused by each arc lamp on the deserted promenade the rain was visible like changing wraiths, seen now and instantly dissolving, blown inland by the fierce wind from the sea, which made it advisable for the pedestrian to seek the shelter of the inner street parallel with the beach, and turned the crossing of each transverse street into an adventure. The gale struck sparks from the Major's cigar as he buffeted his way alone between the shut shops that at other times blazed forth their lights over cheap pipes and walking-sticks, picture-postcards and paper novels, tripe and chocolate, but now solemnly lined the thoroughfare like a double row of mutes mourning for the departed season. Sparks, too, the gale blew from the pipe of the old gentleman as he struggled along more slowly behind the Major, not joining him because, though a man might confide his hopes and fears to decent strangers at chance tables in the hydros of the earth, he might hardly presume to fraternise with them out of doors.

Next morning the Major left to meditate in fresh hotels his contemplated voyage round the world; and the old gentleman remained where he was for a few days, until he realised suddenly that he had not yet found his ideal place, and so set forth in search of it once more.

# OTHER PEOPLE'S HOUSES

Have you ever felt the fascination of other people's houses? Not, it should be explained, the houses of other people whom one knows, but the houses of perfect strangers; all those houses that, nestling behind small shrubs or flush with the street, stretch away into interminable perspectives as one explores an unfamiliar suburb. Near the street they certainly should be—near enough for the passer-by to snatch a glimpse of their interiors; and if they are near the street it goes without saying that they are the houses of the middle class. That glimpse through the window is necessary because the imagination must have something tangible to start from; it can't make bricks without straw. And, since this game I am describing is purely an exercise of the imagination, you need nothing more than that glimpse—that *point d'appui,* as it were; you must know nothing about the house or its inhabitants.

Unaided you float into speculation. The man who should step out and offer to show you round his dwelling would be doing you a disservice. With what distress and disappointment would you contemplate the fumed oak and plush, the imitation Chippendale, and the inferior oil-paintings; learn where each object was picked up and how much it cost. How eagerly would you decline a descent

into the cellarage, or refuse the crowning honour of being taken upstairs to look over the bedrooms. All this proffered intimacy you would exchange gladly for permission to enter unobserved into the garden some night and take a glance through the venetian blind, and then silently steal away without even knowing the name or number of the house you had visited. Permission would be preferable, but is unnecessary; there is a relish in the outwitting of the suspicious housewife; so impregnably does she fortify her front window with occasional tables and potted vegetation, so stoutly does the Family Bible defend—in a second and more literal sense—the sanctity of the home.

Exactly what is this charm that these small, mean houses possess? The houses themselves, as structures of bricks and mortar, have no charm; they are too ugly and monotonous. It is, I suppose, the lives that are lived in them that are interesting, or rather, the lives that one imagines are lived in them. 'Homes for human beings'—that phrase of Ibsen's Master Builder—describes the feeling pretty well. 'Cosy, comfortable, bright homes, where father and mother and the whole troop of children can live in safety and gladness, feeling what a happy thing it is to be alive in the world—and most of all to belong to each other—in great things and in small.' Of course the Master Builder used to build these homes, but before he began to build he must have thought a good deal about them. And it is not wrong, surely, to trace that feeling back to Builder Solness's creator, and to see Ibsen strolling about the Bergen streets wondering what is going on behind the closed shutters. Why,

this game must have been played by the great dramatists and the great novelists as well. Dickens in London ; Balzac in Paris and the towns of Anjou and Touraine ; their eyes pierced stately façade and mean frontage, and saw behind—homes for human beings !

It is in the winter that the mystery of other people's houses grows insupportably strong and oppressive. There is, it is true, something disturbing about a summer evening just before dusk, when the air grows cool and there arises a scent of moist earth and geraniums after the gardens have been watered. But this is not the real thing ; it is, in fact, almost an inversion of the real thing. The house is turned inside out, as it were, the garden becomes part of it ; its personality invades the road and mingles with neighbouring personalities. Life is humming all around like the buzz of bees in hot sunshine ; it breaks over you in waves, indecently. Whereas in winter life retreats indoors like a snail within its shell. Romance is coy ; it has to be hunted down and surprised in its retreats. Every house, in short, is itself again.

Dusk is the perfect time ; after they have lighted up, but before they have pulled down the blinds. Or, better still, dusk before they have lighted up at all, so that the firelight turns traitor and gives away the secrets that it should cherish to its last flicker. Just as in this house, for instance, at the corner of this vista of dwellings along which the east wind is sweeping. Looking through into the sitting-room, brazenly, the firelight shows us a white-haired old lady seated in an easy-chair. There is a letter

in her lap ; she is wiping her spectacles. It is only a glimpse. We pass on, but is that all we have seen, an old lady sitting in front of the fire ? I say that the old lady is a widow, and that she is sitting here alone because the children have flown from the nest and gone into the world about their own business. That letter is from her son in Canada, for the boys are all abroad, and she often wonders when they will come home.

> Home from the Indies, and home from the ocean,
> Heroes and soldiers, they all shall come home.

Yes . . . but she won't be here to see them. They will go into the cemetery some fine evening to look at her grave, and walk round this way to look at the old home and find it turned into a shop.

And if you should tell me that you happen to know the old lady ? That she is no widow, but would be a great deal happier if she were, because the old gentleman her husband spends too much time at the public-house round the corner. That she has no sons at all, only a daughter married to a butcher at Blackpool, who beats her, and that this letter is probably the weekly budget of his misdeeds. Well, what matter if you do tell me these things ? They may be gospel truth, or it may be that you can play the game as well as another. Yours is merely another version, quite as good as mine, and not half so sentimental.

And so all down the street, and in street after street ; and not only in all the streets of your own suburb, but in the streets of unfamiliar suburbs. It is extraordinary what a lot of houses

there are in strange suburbs, and what a number of people live in them. People one has never met, and never will meet, going to the post or the grocer's, because they have their own post-office and their own grocery store. Nice people, some of them; people whom it would have been a pleasure to know if one had settled down in their neighbourhood, and whose acquaintance might have altered the current of a life. That girl, for instance, whom one would certainly have married; only the house at Kersal was less desirable than the villa at West Didsbury, and so one never happened to meet her.

# HAWTHORN LODGE

When first I used to go to Hawthorn Lodge it always seemed to be too full. It was a substantial, comfortable house, but the Pipers were such a big family that there did not seem room for them all. When, as happened frequently, I stopped the night at Hawthorn Lodge I had to share Harry Piper's bed, and it was a constant grievance with the twins, Lionel and Gordon, that they could not have separate rooms. That, indeed, would have been impossible, for Mrs. Piper could not manage to find space for even a single regular spare room; and when anybody of importance (unlike myself) came to stay there was always a complicated readjustment of accommodation, and not a little grumbling from persons dispossessed of their accustomed couches. Whether it would not be expedient to enlarge the house was constantly debated by the family. Mrs. Piper was strongly in favour of doing so. 'You 're doing so well at the works, Silas, that I 'm sure we could afford it; and the house is our own, so we shouldn't have to consider the landlord,' she would say. Vincent, the eldest son, of whom we boys stood in great awe because he was twenty-seven, used to prepare sketch plans of the projected extensions. These plans Mr. Piper would study in an evening, putting on his spectacles for the purpose, and spreading out the

papers well under the chandelier. He criticised each scheme severely, and always managed to find some practical objection that had been overlooked. It was impossible, for instance, to throw a billiard-room out from the dining-room, because that would mean sacrificing the vine on the south wall; a vine which produced no grapes, it is true, but which was a curiosity for miles around. Then, again, of the new spare bedroom that might be built out over the billiard-room, he would point out that you would be able to approach it only through his own room, and that it would be embarrassing for the visitor to discover, when he wanted to retire, that Mrs. Piper had already gone to bed.

It used to be very jolly at Hawthorn Lodge in those days. The place was full of the boys and their friends, for each boy had a different set. Vincent's friends, as befitted his years, were mature and sedate. They discussed politics and literature, and sometimes even, in the absence of Mr. and Mrs. Piper, they discussed ethics. There was one man, I remember, by name Graysmith, with a confident manner and a small, fair moustache that turned up at the ends; him I disliked particularly—but there was a reason for that. On the whole the various sets got on very well together. Ernest's friends were ripping chaps; mostly from the University, where Ernest was studying medicine. There was sure to be some fun when they were around, and there was even the chance of something really exciting. One day, I recollect, the potting-shed at the bottom of the garden was blown up, and Ernest went about with very little hair and no eyebrows for

a few weeks. They had been experimenting in the manufacture of bombs, it appeared. My own particular friend was Harry; we shared a motor-cycle and kept it in a little special house constructed at the back of the greenhouse. When I say we shared it, of course I mean that it belonged to Harry; but we fixed up a fore-carriage and took it in turns to drive the thing. The twins at that time were hardly seventeen, and their friends were unimportant and were merely tolerated. Still, they helped to fill up. But I come now to by far the most notable member of that family. It was a girl, of course; Mary, the only daughter. You will understand that amongst all those boys Mary had a very good time; she was a sort of princess, but no end of a sport, quite unaffected and unspoilt. Her brothers worshipped her, and so, I must confess, did some of their friends; and perhaps that accounted for more than one coolness. She was twenty-one, and two years older than I was, but I shall never forget the black despair that came over me when I surprised her and Graysmith in the raspberry-bushes one summer evening. The raspberries were very tall that year, and Graysmith's arm was round her waist. I think it was from that hour that I hated Graysmith.

I don't know whether I can manage to convey to you what a happy place Hawthorn Lodge used to be then; how full of life, of youth, of gaiety. You must imagine, of an evening, the tennis-court going full swing, or the constant crack of cricket balls from the paddock. You must imagine quick footsteps on the gravel paths, fresh voices ringing

in the orchard, and the flutter of white skirts amongst the bushes. And Mrs. Piper gently promenading her pugs with an air of exercising a sort of indulgent general supervision, and Mr. Piper strolling about benevolently in a garden hat, smoking a cigar with the chairman of the Urban District Council, and old Mr. Piper—Grandfather—sitting on a bench in a sunny spot with the paper, thinking what clever fellows those leader-writers were, and wishing he could understand them. Then, later on, a deep-toned gong would boom out, and we would troop in to a generous supper, where everybody was welcome, and where there was plenty for everybody but not half enough room to eat comfortably. That was what Hawthorn Lodge was like, as I say, rather more than ten years ago.

I happened to go past Hawthorn Lodge yesterday; I did not call, but stood awhile and looked over the gate. I do not think that the improvements pleased me very much. To be sure, the house is more imposing, but there is an irregularity about the façade that offends my eye. Round the dining-room corner you can just see an angle of the new billiard-room; 'new' every one calls it, though the red brick is already beginning to mellow. The conservatory opening out of the drawing-room, for which the big rose-bed had to be sacrificed, gives the building a bloated, dropsical air. And the two new attic bedrooms, added above the original top story, are not the same colour as the rest of the house, and look like a new bowler hat on the top of a frayed, picturesque shooting-jacket. It was after Grandfather Piper's death that they began to enlarge

Hawthorn Lodge. He passed away quietly in his sleep one night, and Mrs. Piper had his room made into a sort of library or writing-room, a luxury she had often desired. Each of the twins was so disappointed by this arrangement that Mr. Piper at last was persuaded to build the new bedrooms on the top story. Then Ernest bought a practice in the south of England, and Mr. Piper had the old playroom made into a comfortable smoke-room or lounge. Just after Vincent got married and took a house of his own they decided to throw out the billiard-room, and the conservatory was added when Lionel went out to India. I have never been to Hawthorn Lodge since Harry, my friend, was drowned in Ireland; but I know that Gordon went wrong and is never heard of now, and that Mary married Graysmith and lives in London.

I was wondering, as I looked over the gate yesterday, what Mr. and Mrs. Piper do in that empty house that used to be so full. He, perhaps, knocks the balls about on the billiard-table in an evening, whilst she plays Handel imperfectly in the drawing-room; and then he sips his whisky-and-soda in the lounge, maybe, whilst she writes letters in the library. And every night they will have the choice of eight or ten unoccupied bedrooms to sleep in. Mr. Piper is building a fine new motor garage, they tell me, on the site of the potting-sheds that Ernest and his friends blew up. Well, well. . . . Mrs. Piper, I remember, always wanted to have the electric light put in at Hawthorn Lodge. As soon as she is dead Mr. Piper, I suppose, will make a point of seeing that it is done.

# FRITZ'S

The tramcars go swinging down the street as regular as Fate, and in their wake the mob. In the gutter the newsboy cries aloud, and the cheap-jack publishes his wares in the doorway. You, too, who are of the mob, pass along with the rest of your kind. You do not hear the racket because you have heard it so often, nor do you look to right or left, because you have seen a thousand times all that there is to be seen. You have seen, for instance, but have not noticed, that narrow tunnel burrowing its way between a couple of shops with the air of merely serving their back premises; or if you have noticed it you have suspected it, probably, of providing furtive access to some lurking public-house, too disreputable to venture out into the open. But the tunnel is a thoroughfare. Penetrate it far enough, and you find yourself, unaccountably, in a nook amongst the houses, sudden as a clearing in the jungle. Something of the jungle's quiet hangs over the tiny square. The roar of the neighbouring traffic is dulled and softened to the music of distant surf. Steep buildings rise like cliffs all about this dim pool of silence, shutting out the common noises of the town—shutting out the sunlight, too, save at high noon in summer.

Even at midsummer it is only the pale ghost of

sunshine that filters through the narrow panes of these forgotten warehouses, sunshine with all the glory gone out of it. It is like sparkling yellow wine that one has poured into the glass and left untouched. But indeed how should the light invade these dusky places? Once they were dwellings, town houses of merchant princes whose printed cottons floated leisurely round the Cape, bound for the marts of Delhi or Indore; whose flowered chintzes Emma Woodhouse hung over at the counter of Mrs. Ford's shop in Highbury. Heads, perhaps, were thrust from these windows when young Charles Edward clattered into the market-place on his road to Derby; and within these walls, surely, high festival marked Trafalgar and the humbled might of France and Spain. Now they are warehouses, but most of them are empty, for the worn, sunken floors are too crazy to support the weight of piles of cloth. The smoke-stained red-brick walls are uneven and bulging; held together by iron stays, propped apart by huge baulks of timber, they give one the idea that they are on the point of crumbling to pieces. Soon all these warehouses will be pulled down to make way for a new street. Meanwhile, squeezed in between a couple of them, stands a little two-story building painted a dingy yellow, decorated with window-boxes filled with doomed geraniums. This is Fritz's.

There never seems to be anybody at Fritz's. That is the chief charm of the place. It is a rare thing if you can count three customers lunching there at one time. When you go inside you can hardly see anything at first. The interior is full of gloom. It is not, however, a depressing gloom; it is like the

background of a Dutch picture, rich and mysterious. High lights flash out of it here and there—the pallid shimmer of a tablecloth, the gleam of cut-glass and silver-plate, the glint of brass beer-handles. There is just a dash of colour in the faint pinks and deep reds of the German *delicatessen* on the counter, and the pale greens of a heap of salad. Time has deepened everything else into a mellow concord of browns—the brown of trodden linoleum, the smoky brown of the ceiling, the faded brown of walls long-papered, the generous brown of polished mahogany. The brown shadows linger everywhere, and the rafters hang low.

Fritz was a pushing young German when he opened his restaurant. Now he is melancholy and old, with a heavy drooping moustache which gives him the aspect of a kind, gentlemanly walrus, and his eyes are tired and resigned. He is very friendly, and loves to come and talk to you. If you know him well you may chaff him gently (after making your compliments on the lunch), and ask him how on earth, with so few customers, he manages to make the place pay. He will tell you that he doesn't. At least he told me so the other day.

'When I started, fifty-three years ago, the trade was busy all around here, and I was crowded. Now the trade is gone away, over there, to the new part of the town, and Fritz's is left stranded like a ship on the shore when the sea has gone down. It is no use complaining.'

'Why don't you retire?' I said.

He smiled rather wanly, and made a vague gesture. 'What else is there for me to do?' he

asked. 'My wife is dead, and I am too old to go back to Germany.'

'But if you are losing money——'

'Why, yes; I cannot go on losing money indefinitely.'

He hesitated and looked at me searchingly, and then pointed to the only other person in the room, an old gentleman seated with his back to us pursuing his meal. The old gentleman, it appeared, had been one of a party of young fellows who were accustomed to meet for lunch at Fritz's over fifty years ago. They had gone on meeting, day by day, ever since, though as the years went on their number gradually diminished. Some died; some left the city. One of them went to London and became famous, so Fritz said. He mentioned a name which I recognised as that of a mid-Victorian playwright, an author of farces already forgotten. And now of all the party only the old gentleman was left. But he still came every day.

'He comes for the memories,' said Fritz. 'It would break his heart if I were to close. But he is getting old and infirm; I do not think he will live very long now. When he is dead . . . why, I dare say I will retire.'

. . . . . .

I followed the old gentleman out of Fritz's, and in the street we nodded to each other, for we were slightly acquainted.

'Hallo!' he grunted, 'do you come to this dismal hole, too?'

I said I thought it rather charming.

'You must have a queer taste,' he replied. 'Give

me one of those new, cheerful places they 're putting up nowadays. There 's too many ghosts hanging round Fritz's for my liking. Besides, it 's so far from the office now I 've moved into the new packing-house in Rutland Row.'

' But you come here every day ? ' I said.

' Yes ; I can't very well help it. I 've been coming here for fifty years, and old Fritz would never get over it if I gave him up now. But,' he became confidential, ' Fritz is breaking up. He won't last much longer, you 'll see. And then I 'll make a change.' He patted me on the back. ' Fifty years of German cooking is enough for any man's stomach, my boy.'

# ANNIVERSARIES AND OLD LETTERS

'To-MORROW,' said my Aunt Maria, 'will be the anniversary of cousin Jane Carrington's wedding.'

'Really?' I said politely.

'On no account must I miss the nine o'clock post to-night,' said my Aunt Maria.

In one respect my Aunt Maria is a marvel. As a family authority she is unparalleled. She never forgets an anniversary, in spite of her seventy-two years. The principal traffic of her evening days is the directing of congratulatory letters or missives of a more solemn nature to the addresses of all relatives concerned. It seems probable that if by the operation of some act of God (as the insurance companies say), or other wholesale clearance, the family should be wiped out of existence, my Aunt Maria, feeling that her appointed time had come, would lay down her pen and fade away within the year. She could not endure the approach, one by one, of the pregnant dates and not be able to share their savour with another. For a stranger, an outsider, be he never so sympathetic, can hardly pretend to be touched by these intimate particular emotions. His sympathy is in the nature of an intrusion. What do you care, for instance, about the day on which my cousin Jane Carrington was married? It is nothing to you whether she was married at all.

There comes a time to every man when his birthday is not an event to be looked forward to with rejoicing. There comes a time when, so far from looking forward to it, he would fain forget it altogether; and I am now, I regret to say, approaching that dread season. It is particularly depressing, therefore, to receive, as I did the other morning, a letter from my Aunt Maria beginning: 'It is a solemn thought, dear nephew, that another year has rolled away, and that you are a stage farther on your journey towards the grave....' It is beautiful, of course, that a woman should consecrate her life to the gentle task of consoling and cheering her fellow-creatures through the medium of the General Post-office, but it is regrettable that my aunt cannot see the silver lining without being instantly reminded of the cloud. She is a woman of a serious frame of mind. A wedding or a birthday, which to most people would be a day of rejoicing, is to her an occasion for solemn reflection, for steeling the heart and bracing the muscles against possible disaster to come. The more festive the celebration, the more fitting the opportunity for a few words of exhortation. She would have made a splendid hostess at an Egyptian feast, would my Aunt Maria; she would have seen to it that the mummy was laid out with the rest of the table decorations. 'A stage farther on your journey to the grave. . . .' That is how she sees life, as a sort of pilgrimage, with the cemetery as the grand object or climax. If she cared for novels she would, I am sure, prize the novels of Arnold Bennett above all others; she would admire 'the personally conducted tour from the cradle, through Bursley, to the grave,' as Max has

it. I shall have to buy her *The Old Wives' Tale* for her next birthday, if only I can remember when that is !

That is where my Aunt Maria has the advantage of me. You would not catch *her* wondering whether she could manage to remember *my* birthday, or the birthday of any other of her kin, to the third and fourth generation. A famous and wonderful thing is the sheer bulk of her literary output as an author of private letters, but even more remarkable is her power of remembering the anniversaries she celebrates so religiously. I could not understand how she did it. I used to suspect her of keeping a sort of private log or family year-book, compiled on the principle invented by the people who arrange lists of Noteworthy Events in the pocket diaries. These ingenious ones, you will recollect, make it a point of honour to unearth one event for every day in the year. Nothing that has happened is hidden from their eyes; all history, ancient and modern, is subject to them. Thus — Oct. 21st: Battle of Trafalgar, 1805. Oct. 22nd: Earthquake in Essex, 1884. Oct. 23rd: Mungo Park born, 1771. Oct. 24th: Translation of Saint Martin (no date); and so on. I do not vouch for the accuracy of these events, but they serve to convey the idea. It seemed to me quite likely that my Aunt Maria might proceed on similar lines with—Feb. 22nd: Grandfather died, 1867. Feb. 23rd: Drawing-room on fire, 1889. Feb. 24th: Ernest had measles, 1904. Feb. 25th: Uncle Tom refused by Miss Smith, 1892; and so forth. I could not imagine her suffering even a single blank day gladly. But when I accused her of the

practice of thus secretly tabulating the anniversaries she grew vastly indignant. 'Thank you,' she said, 'my memory 's as good as ever it was. You will be lucky if you have one as good when you are my age.'

My Aunt Maria keeps all the letters she has ever received stored in a great tin box which lies concealed beneath her bed. She sticks to them all like grim death. She was never known to destroy even a postcard. She lays them down like wine, and with the lapse of years they ripen, so to speak, until they attain maturity. And they have this advantage over some wines: the older they grow the better they become, nor can they ever get past their best. She has even told me that she prefers my own old letters to my present ones. The fact is worth remembering. I find it increasingly difficult to compose missives of the proper weight and seriousness nowadays. I am always filling up with frivolous details. Perhaps I have said all there is to be said about the family. I must consider whether it would not be possible, when gravelled for lack of matter in future, to say, 'Kindly refer to mine of June 21, 1899,' for I am sure she keeps everything indexed or in a chronological sequence. She has, I find, regular days for going through the tin box and perusing the correspondence, devoting each day (I imagine) to one member of the family or to some group of allied members. Sometimes when I am staying with her she will begin: 'You don't remember your grandmother Thompson, I suppose, though you were taken to see her when you were a little boy. She was a wonderful old woman; she lived to ninety-

two, and managed her farm to the end. She used to smoke, too. It was quite a sight to see her sitting on one side of the fireplace and her husband on the other, each with a churchwarden pipe alight. . . .' On such occasions I know that my Aunt Maria has been indulging in her secret vice. So all these old people whom one had thought dead and gone long ago have not quite disappeared. They still exist in the tin box under the bed, and come out now and then for an airing. But some day my Aunt Maria herself will die, and then the old people will fade away for good, and the tin box will be cast on to the rubbish heap.

Meanwhile it is the tin box that is the explanation of my aunt's wonderful accuracy. I am sure that this is the truth, though I must be careful lest I wound her by suggesting it. You see, it is all bound up together. She pores over the old letters, and they bring to her mind anniversaries which require to be celebrated anew in fresh letters. And the answers to these, I suppose, in their turn will become old letters themselves, and will fire the train of memory in the future.

# HANOVER HOUSE

I HAVE been rather often to see Mrs. Hallways since Rex went to South Africa. He was the last of them to leave home, and I fancy she is sometimes very lonely now they are all gone. Hanover House (where she lives) is still quite charming, although they have just pulled down Brunswick Lodge next door, and are about to cover the site with tiny villas. Mean buildings, too, that will be perilously like slums in ten years, are creeping towards the back of the stables, but fortunately the old stout red-brick garden wall is high enough to keep them out of sight. I don't think that Mrs. Hallways really notices these invaders without her gates; they do not seriously incommode her at any rate, and they serve as a pleasant evergreen topic for gossip. She does not use the garden very much. Save for taking an occasional stroll to enjoy the fresh green on a spring morning, or for drinking tea underneath the big chestnut on a summer afternoon, she hardly uses it at all. It is wide enough on all sides, however, to keep the world at arm's length, and to preserve the house —that inner citadel of peace—from all rough contacts. Within Mrs. Hallways holds sway over a quiet domain, a sway none the less absolute because it is of the mildest. Clara is her lieutenant, that solemn old maidservant who was nurse to all the

children one after the other; and these two women, who have fitted so many youthful intelligences for the encounter with life, sit at home together in the empty nest. Their one constant preoccupation is with the foreign mails.

Hanover House was built, I imagine, at a time when the connection of our Royal House with the German kingdom was a close one, and the name was once as adventurously topical as were once the Alberts and Alexandras that have been absorbed into the substance of each of our great towns. It was formerly the property of Mr. Hallways's father, and Mr. Hallways himself was born and died beneath its roof. It is a house made for ease. The corners of all the principal rooms are rounded off into curves, which give it an air of being upholstered generally. There are columns in the wide hall, and columns flank the ample bow-window embrasure in the drawing-room; the broad, shallow stairs sweep round in a curve, and the very hand-rail twists itself into the most elaborate involution about its newel-post. The furniture is appropriate. You are at a loss to understand how these mahogany cliffs — these buttresses of walnut—can ever be dislodged for domestic purposes. You contemplate them as you might the Pyramids, and wonder how they got there. You feel that they must have been designed and built where they stand, and that, short of demolishing the house, there can be no means of removing them. By what strange chance has the third generation deserted this solid, comfortable shelter for other and more doubtful homes?

Of course Merton did the only possible thing in

going abroad. He might have chosen somewhere nearer than Australia, it is true; for though Melbourne is a fine place it is 'rather far from Town,' as the gentleman says in Mr. Hyndman's reminiscences; but there is no doubt that Merton *had* to go. I dare say that the trouble has blown over now, and that he might come back if he chose; but there he is, comfortably settled and doing very well from all accounts. I always suspect that Mrs. Hallways feels that she and her husband were just a little to blame about Merton. The eldest son often has to endure a stricter supervision than his brothers experience after him, and a too irksome restraint defeats its own end. It is a fact that the other three boys had much more liberty after they left school than Merton enjoyed, and they haven't done any the worse for it. Certainly *they* didn't make the Old Country too hot to hold them, if the phrase is not too strong in Merton's case. Alan is at Shanghai for his firm, and Jimmy—well, there would have been no keeping Jimmy at home anyhow. He is a rover born. There is one in most large families. Jimmy started by going to sea, and at present he owns a farm in Saskatchewan, though I hear, by the way, that he is thinking of selling it. Again, it wasn't Violet's fault that the man she married happened to be an American, though it was the bitterest disappointment to Mrs. Hallways, who might at least have hoped to keep her daughter nearer home. She consoled herself with the reflection that New York is not so very far away nowadays. Compared with China and Melbourne, it is only just round the corner. 'I should see nearly as little of

her if she lived in London,' said Mrs. Hallways mildly.

In the breakfast-room at Hanover House there is a magnificent affair in ceremonial, august, and polished woods, and behind its glazed doors is contained a complicated series of little drawers. Five of these are boldly docketed with Christian names, and here Mrs. Hallways keeps the letters from abroad, neatly arranged in chronological order. When I called upon her the other day Rex's drawer was open, and she was just consigning to its appointed place the latest letter from Cape Colony.

'He 's doing so well with his fruit,' she reported gleefully. 'These Cape grapes are going to turn out very profitable, so he tells me.' The letter was handed to me. 'You see he actually suggests that I should go out and visit him,' she said, smiling rather sadly. 'Silly fellow, he might as well propose that I should take a trip to the moon.'

'But why not? Why shouldn't you go and visit him?'

'Oh! . . . I couldn't leave the house.'

'Shut it up.'

'Impossible! It hasn't been shut up since first I came into it.'

'Then leave it in charge of Clara.'

'*Clara!* Clara couldn't undertake the responsibility!' (This as if it had been proposed that Clara should take over and manage a spinning mill or similar going concern!)

'You 've got plenty of money, and you 're as sound as a bell,' I said. 'Why don't you make up your mind to have a good round tour and see the

lot of them ? Like this. First you go to the Cape and stay with Rex for a few months. Then when you 're tired of each other it isn't very far across the—er—What-do-you-call-it Ocean and along up to Shanghai ; and from there you could slip down quite easily to see Merton in Australia. Then across the Pacific to Vancouver . . . they are pretty decent boats, I believe. And once in America you kill two birds with one stone, Jimmy and Violet are so near together, you see. You could do it comfortably in about eighteen months or a couple of years, and when you 'd finished you 'd be just about ready to begin the round again.'

Mrs. Hallways listened as if I were propounding a heresy. ' And what, pray, should I do with Hanover House all that time ? Leave Clara in charge indefinitely ? '

' I should let it, and take Clara with you.'

' And the furniture ? '

' Sell it,' I said boldly.

Mrs. Hallways looked at me queerly. ' I 'm afraid you don't quite understand. It 's not that I wouldn't give *anything* to see the children again . . . that 's all I 've left to hope for. But I couldn't *think* of leaving the house ! Selling the furniture ! That 's *quite* out of the question.'

And so it is, of course, when you come to think about it.

# THE TEASHOP

It does not look quite like a teashop outside; but how attractive is the great heap of hollow yellow cakes, the colour of ripe corn, piled unevenly in the right-hand window, and when you go inside you do, indeed, find that tea may be had in the back part of the shop, a place imperfectly screened by a wide curtain composed of threaded beads and reeds. The purpose of this curtain is not too clear. It would be foolish for a girl to make a secret assignation in the teashop, since the curtain is too transparent to afford any cover; it is no use for keeping out draughts, and it is certainly rather in the way; for when the two little girls who serve in the shop pass through it to bring you more cakes they are obliged to gather up an armful and put it on one side, setting the whole thing swaying and clattering faintly like an unmelodious Japanese harp. Probably it is not intended to be a veil, but the symbol of a veil, marking the place where the shop ends and the teashop begins. A chalk line on the floor would have done just as well.

No, it cannot be a secret assignation that she has made, the young woman who is sitting there alone behind the curtain; and yet surely it is an assignation of some sort. She must be waiting for somebody,

sitting on the bent cane chair in front of the severe little oblong table of white marble. Tea, in the cheap white fluted service, stands before her, and cakes on a glass dish with a stem to it; but she hardly pretends to take an interest in these. She sits there in a hat that cannot have cost much at any time, a hat which is just too big and heavy for her tiny oval face; and from under its brim her eyes, with the slanting brows which give her perpetually the air of being just a little surprised, peer out anxiously. She looks at the door, but nobody ever seems to come into the shop, so she looks at the passers-by in the street, turning her head expectantly from side to side as a step is heard on the pavement in either direction. She is not certain which way he is coming. What will he be like when he does come? Tall and loose-limbed, with his hair swept smoothly back? Small and plumpish, like the young woman herself? Perhaps with slanting eyebrows too, which will give him also the air of being just a little surprised, in which case when he comes they will look like a couple of canaries in a cage, sitting behind the bars of the curtain, pecking at bits of cake.

The two neat little girls who serve in the shop have grey, untroubled eyes and long hair the colour not of ripe corn, but of unripe corn. They are sisters, and the one should be about fourteen and the other sixteen years of age. They go about their business very quietly, hardly speaking, and when you ask them for hot water they answer in an undertone, as if afraid of disturbing the tranquillity of the place. When they are doing nothing they stand on opposite sides of the shop, one behind either

counter, placidly gazing out of the windows. What can they be thinking about the while? They, like the young woman, seem to be waiting, but they cannot have made assignations. They are waiting not for an individual young man, but for a young man at present undistinguished from the general body of Young Men. They are waiting for Life to come to them like a tide and sweep them out of this backwater; and Life, of course, will come in the person of a young man. As they look vacantly out of the windows they must be wondering what their young men will be like when they do come. It is inconceivable that they can be thinking about anything else.

The young woman, however, knows exactly what her young man is like, though still he does not come, and his continued, unaccountable delay causes one to grow curious about him. He may, for instance, be dullish, with a red face and a sprouting fair moustache; or, again, he may be pale, alert, and keen-faced, with shiny black hair and a turn for humorous epigram. Not this last, it is to be hoped, for the girl then would laugh at him when he spoke to her. Her laughter might of course be musical; it might be gently modulated; it might fall agreeably upon the ear; but no matter how desirable her laughter may be absolutely, there is no doubt that it would sound discordant in the teashop. It would be singularly out of keeping with the spirit of this place of meditation. This is a spot for parting, for sitting side by side with no word spoken. One could be miserable here, beautifully, for half-hours together, and enjoy it. There is a great deal of pleasure to

be had by fitting one's mood to the situation one is in. After all, that is the secret of happiness.

Suddenly, in the street, just out of sight, a band begins to play. It is one of those bands that play music as one mows grass, fells timber, or performs any other arduous task, not for pleasure, but because it is one's duty. Without seeing it you are aware that its constituent members are wearing baggy trousers and cloth caps, all except one who is wearing a peaked hat, which will presently be handed about for the purpose of receiving contributions. The band plays with the utmost gravity a waltz which was popular the winter before last; and having completed the refrain with certain definitely marked emphases of expression, and in spite of certain definitely marked flaws, caused by the imperfect technical accomplishment of individual executants, proceeds to repeat it once more with precisely the same emphases and precisely the same flaws. Then it embarks upon a two-step, and you feel that the change has been accomplished without any perceptible alteration in the time. An elephant, surely, would be grateful for dance-music played as this is played.

But inside the shop nobody takes any notice of the band. Gaiety of a factitious or nominal kind is clearly called for; the girls should crowd into the doorway and look round the corner at the band; the young woman should beat time upon the marble slab with a teaspoon. However, the girls, realising that this is not that aspect of life which they are awaiting, continue to gaze out of the windows with their untroubled grey eyes, and the young woman does not cease to stare expectantly into the street.

Even when the flute whimpers like a beaten puppy her composure remains undisturbed. For a moment her eyes hover about the shelf of sugar-icing decorations which have garnished wedding-cakes in the past, or which will garnish wedding-cakes in the future (which can it be ?); and no doubt she is noticing their extraordinary resemblance as they stand in a row under their glass shades to those fantastic offerings to the memory of the dead which adorn countless graves in countless cemeteries. Then she, like the two little girls, looks out again into the street. And the band goes on playing.

Perhaps he will not come at all. . . .

# SHORT STORIES

# THE DYING LIE

The rain was falling heavily, and up in the garret, nestling close beneath the dilapidated roof, the relentless patter of drops and gurgle of running water threatened to become monotonous.

Here and there pools were forming on the floor, augmented by drops which found their way through the slates, and splashed down heavily at intervals.

The dying daylight, reflected by the shining roofs, threw a dreary glare into the room, accentuating its chilliness and nakedness.

There was absolutely no furniture except a mattress and blanket in one corner; there was no fire, no food even. There was not a curtain to shut the desolation without from the desolation within.

A woman stood by the window gazing apathetically across the sea of dirty tiles and venerable tottering chimney-stacks.

A man's form lay on the mattress, huddled beneath the blanket.

The half-subdued murmur of the raindrops was often punctuated by his hacking cough, against which he struggled feebly as against a demon bent on rending him to pieces. He was in the toils of consumption, and death was very near to him. When he spoke his voice was only just audible, and his weakness was like that of an infant.

'Marie, have you no money whatever?' he whispered during the lull between two fits of coughing.

The woman turned towards him.

Her dress was of the plainest and commonest description, and a large shawl was thrown over her head and shoulders, enframing a face still refined, and which, before the finger of poverty and want had touched it, had been almost beautiful. The haggard looks and the gaunt figure spoke eloquently of the length of time since Marie Vaughan had tasted wholesome nourishment. As for her husband, food was not for him, he was dying, and he knew it. 'Arnold, you know I did not get a farthing this afternoon,' said the wife. 'I am nearly used to begging now. I am quite accustomed to be rebuffed and cursed.' She paused, and seemed to hesitate a moment. Then, 'There is one hope,' she continued. Vaughan's eyes questioned her eagerly. 'I have written to an old friend of yours, and mine,' she said slowly. 'I saw him going into an hotel in Northumberland Avenue, the Hotel Victoria. I thought he might be staying there, but I did not dare to go in and ask—in my present dress.

'I sent a letter to him, on the chance that he might be stopping at the hotel; but I concealed my handwriting carefully. I wrote as a kindly neighbour of ours might write, saying an old friend of his was seriously ill, and giving our address. I was ashamed to write openly to him, confessing our need. My last penny went on the stamp.'

'Who is it?' asked Arnold feverishly.

'We have never seen him for four years, since we have been married,' went on Marie. 'It is——'

'Not Tremaine?'

'Yes, Harry Tremaine.'

The man sank back at the name, and lay for nearly a minute in a silence which his wife did not dare to break.

'Come here!' he said at last.

She obeyed, wondering.

'Kneel down, and bend over me!' he commanded.

As she did so he summoned up all his strength, and struck her in the face.

It was but the shadow of a blow, so weak was he, but the suddenness of it was startling, and Marie fell back sobbing while the watchful demon of a cough sprang upon Vaughan, and tried to stifle his life-breath.

In a few minutes the woman was calm again, and rose.

'Why did you strike me, Arnold?' she asked simply.

'How dare you appeal to that fellow?' was his counter-question.

'Why do you hate him? He was your friend once. You never quarrelled with him; he left England before our marriage, and still thinks kindly of us—and envies our happiness, no doubt,' she finished bitterly.

'I hate him because he loved you,' said Vaughan.

'What if he did, why——'

'And because you loved him, love him still, and never cared for me.' The wretched man succumbed to another attack, induced by his excitement.

Marie waited till it was over, and then spoke quietly and dispassionately.

'Arnold, you are right. I never loved you. How

could I, when my father forced me to marry you, in spite of my love for Harry, for Mr. Tremaine; and in spite of his love for me. You knew of it at the time, and my father knew it, but in those days you were rich and Harry was poor. Now the positions are reversed; Harry is almost fabulously wealthy, and we—since the bank failure—we have descended through depths of poverty to the awful position we are in now. I have been a good wife to you,' she continued. 'I have tended you in your illness and shared your degradation. I have always loved Mr. Tremaine, and never you, but,' and her voice broke, 'I always respected you, till that blow.'

She moved towards the door.

'And now,' she added proudly, 'I am going out to beg for you.'

Vaughan made no reply, and the delicately nurtured lady descended the rickety staircase, and went out into the drenching rain to ask alms of passing strangers.

For half an hour the dying man lay alone. It was a half hour of mental anguish to him, his old jealousy of Tremaine returning to him stronger than before, even at the gates of Death. And the feeling was more poignant as he reflected that his wife would be amply provided for, after his death, by her old lover. Perhaps, and the thought was horrible to him, they might, after a period passed in the hollow mockery of mourning for him, be married. Such things often occurred, he reflected.

The thought kept recurring and taunting him, as he realised his helplessness to prevent even a meeting, if Tremaine should receive his wife's letter.

And when at last a heavy footstep sounded on the stairs, Vaughan knew who was approaching; when the door was knocked at and opened, he could not bear to look upon the rival he had not seen for four years. He buried his head in the blanket, and in doing so there sprang from the lowest depths of his nature a cruel plot.

If he could but keep up his strength he might cheat them yet, he thought.

Accordingly he looked up at the intruder.

Harry Tremaine's well-built frame was buried in a great Inverness, and he wore a flapped travelling cap, as some protection against the storm. His streaming umbrella left a sinuous trail on the bare boards. He was an ordinary gentlemanly Englishman, pleasant to look at, and cheery to converse with.

'Arnold!' he cried, and gazed in astonishment round the empty attic, 'Arnold, what awful thing has happened to you? I heard you were poor, but this destitution is what I never dreamed of.' But when he saw his old friend's face he was silent. Death had already placed his stamp upon Arnold Vaughan, and Tremaine understood it instantly.

His businesslike mind was at work, however.

'Have you no doctor? Where is Marie?' he asked hurriedly. 'You should have been moved from here. But where is your wife?'

Vaughan trembled with excitement, for the crucial moment had come.

'Harry,' he replied, avoiding the questions, 'have you been long at the Victoria?'

Surprised at the demand, Tremaine answered him:

'Three weeks, about. I have not been long in England. But never mind that now. Where is Mrs. Vaughan? We must get a doctor in at once.'

'Stop, Harry,' whispered Vaughan, 'it is useless. I want to say something, to confess something.' His intensity held Tremaine, and he listened. 'I knew you were at the Victoria; I saw you go in, about a fortnight ago, before I finally broke down. Yesterday I got a neighbour to write to you and beg you to come and see me.'

The man had embarked upon the perilous sea of deception. 'But your wife, why did she not write?' Tremaine paused and then asked fearfully: 'She is not dead, Arnold?'

Arnold turned to the wall, away from the questioner.

'No,' he replied, 'she is not dead.'

'Where is she then?'

'Oh, Harry, I am dying, you can see that. Don't spurn me when I tell you—forgive me if you can—I have left her.'

Tremaine caught his breath and gazed incredulously at the liar beneath the blanket.

'I abandoned her, cruelly like a brute.' The unhappy man was enveloped in a perfect tornado of coughing, from which he emerged gasping and breathless.

'It was in New York,' he explained; 'a few months ago I wanted to come back to England to die, and I had not enough to bring us both back, so I just left her.'

There was silence. Tremaine could not speak. He staggered away to the window, and stood grasping

the sill, trying to realise what the news meant. He could not conceive the whole horror of the case at first, and before his brain had cleared Vaughan half raised himself in a frenzied supplication.

'For heaven's sake, Harry, go and find her! Leave me here to die, and go at once. A boat sails for New York to-morrow.'

The magnitude of the task occurred to neither of them. 'I cannot leave you here alone, in your condition. Once you were a friend of mine,' said Harry coldly.

'Go! Go! By the love you bore her, I entreat you. Find her if it can be done.' Then with a last effort, 'Listen!' he cried, 'I left her penniless; without a farthing.'

Tremaine recoiled from him.

'Now swear you will go, swear you will seek her!'

Harry stood and looked at the prostrate figure. 'I swear it,' he said slowly. Then a wave of indignation and disgust swept over him. Heedless of the condition of Vaughan, 'You coward! You mean skulking coward! As you left her, so will I leave you!' he cried. Then he turned and rushed from the room, without a farewell glance at the dying man.

Vaughan fell back upon the mattress. The sea of deception was crossed, and he was safe in port. He burst into hysterical laughter, and then the cough came.

. . . . . .

It was almost dark, and still raining. Half blind with rage and grief, Tremaine dashed down the stairs. A woman wearing a shawl covering her head and screening her face was entering the door

from the street. She stood in his way, and grasped his arm. 'For the love of God, sir, give me some money,' she implored.

Tremaine hardly heard her; he only saw that she hindered his passage. With a curse he flung her to one side, not really conscious of what he was doing, and plunged into the storm of rain.

Marie Vaughan sank to the ground, stunned by the violence of the blow, for she was very weak. She lay for some time undisturbed, but at last rose and addressed herself to ascend the stairs, slowly and wearily.

The garret was very still when she entered, and the running water on the roof sounded loudly in her ears.

'Arnold!' she said quietly.

There was no reply but the wail of the growing wind.

'Are you awake?' she asked gently.

A splash of water falling and resounding in the empty room was the only answer.

'Arnold!' she cried hastily, and hurried to the mattress, paling with sudden fear. Trembling she learnt the truth. Her husband had passed away, and the smile on his face was terrible to look upon.

The desolate woman flung herself down by his side, with a moan, echoed weirdly by the wind, as she realised that she was doomed to face the hopeless future and remorseless poverty, alone.

# THE TIME OF HIS LIFE

## I

'CAN I bring you anything, sir?' said a waiter. Sydney was sitting comfortably underneath a clump of yellow chrysanthemums in the glass-roofed Winter Garden.

'Bring me a bottle of Bass,' he replied easily. But he crumpled up instantly under the waiter's reply, delivered in a rather superior pitying tone:

'Sorry, sir, we don't serve beer in the Garden.' With an indistinct notion that the Garden must be, by some means, set apart for the teetotalers, Sydney hastily plumped for coffee as something likely to be safe; and then regretted not having ordered one of those tiny glasses full of attractive yellow or green liquid which people were savouring at neighbouring tables. When the coffee came he lit a pipe and settled down, for the first time, to think out his situation and lay plans for the future.

He was amazed, in the first place, that he had ever summoned up sufficient courage to do what he had done. Chance had thrown the opportunity in his way, but how did it happen that he had had the resolution to grasp it? He recalled, pleasurably, the events of that morning. The senior partner had called for Mr. Graves, the cashier, to make him a bearer cheque for six pounds; but Mr. Graves was

out, enjoying, as was his eustom at eleven o'elock, half a pint of stout in a convenient bar. Aeeordingly it had fallen to Sydney to make out the eheque, and while he was making it out the idea eame to him. He had no time to think about it; he did it almost uneonsciously. The senior partner had not notieed the small spaees after the word 'six' and the figure. He signed the cheque in a hurry; and Sydney, before he took it to the bank, altered the amount to sixty pounds instead of six. The bank cashier notieed nothing wrong, beeause of course the whole body of the eheque was made out in the same handwriting. It was not forgery, at any rate. And when he gave the senior partner his six pounds, Sydney thought joyfully of the fifty-four sovereigns paeked tightly about his own person, and of the good time he would have. The fraud could not be discovered until the pass-book was eompared with the firm's books, and before that day he would have had the time of his life. He would be far away then, and, indeed, might never be caught at all; but even if he were brought back there would still have been that good time which no one could take from him. And how badly he coveted that good time. Living in diggings, without a relation in the world, he found his meagre salary only just suffieient to keep and clothe him. He was a nice-looking boy, and, although he was young, he knew that boys of his age found the means to enjoy themselves even if they were not well off; but his natural timidity prevented him from making the most of his personal appearance. He knew nothing of women, and he had no friends from whom to learn. Conversations

half heard at the office excited his curiosity without satisfying it. How many times had he passionately desired money, not for itself but for the experience it could buy! Now his pockets were full of money, and the good time was within his grasp. He turned the thought over in his mind, tasting it, enjoying it, dallying with it. He had made a poor start, it was true, but he would pull himself together; the golden moments were flying, they would not last for ever.

'I 'm sorry, sir,' said the head waiter at his elbow, 'but pipes are not allowed in the Garden.' The words fell like a cold douche extinguishing Sydney's pleasurable glow.

'Can't I . . . can't I smoke here?' he stammered.

'Only cigars and cigarettes, sir. Can I bring you a cigar?'

'Yes,' said Sydney miserably, wishing he had the courage to order a cigarette. He was rather surprised at having to pay a shilling for the cigar, but he lighted it and prepared to force himself to enjoy it. After all, it was part of the fun; but he did not like being dragooned in this way. People must have heard the waiter's reproof, in spite of the man's discreet tone, and soon Sydney began to fancy he was being laughed at. When a gentleman leaned forward to speak to a friend, it seemed as though the incident was being discussed. He would have liked to go out, but he feared to attract attention by getting up, until at last he realised that the cigar was rather too strong, and that he was in need of fresh air.

When he stood in the windy street with the raindrops beating in his face he felt better, and could

have kicked himself for his stupidity, but all the same he was glad to be out of that disconcerting hotel. Just opposite flashed the glittering façade of a music-hall, with the name of a famous comedian placarded in bold letters on each side of the door. He went in and left the portmanteau in the cloak-room. The house was full, but he might stand at the side of the stalls. The warm, splendidly lighted theatre seemed to welcome him ; he felt at ease at once. Although there were thousands of people in the place, no one took any notice of him, every one was watching the famous comedian ; and when the turn was over Sydney took pleasure in looking at the people. They were wonderful ; tier upon tier of faces, all turned the same way, lustrous in the glow from the stage. He felt at home because he was unnoticed. A gorgeously dressed lady rose from her seat, and brushing past Sydney spoke to a man on his left. They went out together. This was splendid ; this was seeing life indeed. His spirits rose, and he thought that if he had a drink he might feel disposed to answer a lady if one should speak to him, so he went into the bar and ordered a whisky and soda. While he was drinking it he remembered that he had not decided where to stop the night, and that the town was quite strange to him. He asked the barmaid if she could recommend a place. She looked at him curiously, and called out in a loud voice to her colleague :

'Mary, gentleman wants to know a nice quiet hotel where they won't mind him coming in rather late.' Several men in the bar turned and stared at Sydney as Mary, a fat woman with spectacles, came

forward and inspected him. She named a hotel and he thanked her, pulling out some money to pay for his drink at the same time. In his agitation, for he was afraid he had made a fool of himself again, he dropped three sovereigns, and had to hunt for them on the carpet. He reappeared, very red, and tried to appear unconcerned, when suddenly he recognised, within ten feet of him, a familiar back. It was the back of the cashier from the office at home. The colour faded from Sydney's face, and the lights swam before his eyes. He made certain that he had been followed, and remained fascinated, staring at the back for a full minute. He waited, expecting every second to feel a hand on his shoulder, but nothing happened, and the cashier did not turn round. Then with a gasp of joy he remembered that the football team from home had been due to play in the town that afternoon, and that the cashier invariably followed it about by excursion train when it played away. He turned and slunk on tiptoe—although the carpet was a thick one—through the swing door, sweating from every pore. He collected his bag and overcoat, fled into the street, jumped into the first hansom, and drove straight to the hotel which the barmaid had recommended, for he was unable to think of any other address at the moment. He thanked his lucky stars that the cashier had had his back turned towards him. But he did not know that the cashier had been watching him in a mirror all the time. Nor that when he had gone out the cashier had strolled across and spoken to the barmaid, and had afterwards rung up the senior partner on the telephone.

II

Sydney did not stir from the hotel until he was sure that the last train had gone, and that the cashier was safe on his way home with the crowd of football enthusiasts. Then, although it was growing late, he went out, speaking first to the night porter. There was, he felt, the keenest pleasure in walking through the streets, jostling the people coming out of the public-houses and theatres, and looking at the still open shops, with the knowledge that he had enough money in his pocket to buy any one or anything he fancied. Was any one of these people, he wondered, carrying upwards of fifty pounds distributed about his person in four separate parcels ? The reflection made him uneasy. Was it wise, after all, to bring so much money out into the streets ? It had been a choice of two evils ; he had not cared to leave the gold at the hotel, but the thought that he might be robbed was uncomfortable, and so was the unaccustomed weight of the metal. He felt hampered by it, like a man who may have to swim for his life, and who bears a brickbat in each pocket. But perhaps, after all, it was safer to have the money with him, provided he kept a sharp look-out. It would never do to be robbed before he had had the time of his life.

After walking up and down for a while Sydney understood that though the bustle of the main streets was in one way a pleasure, in another way it was a drawback. It was all too public. More than one woman smiled at him as he passed, but an extraordinary sense of delicacy prevented him from

responding to such advances. You could tell an improper story, perhaps, to a friend in private, but you could not tell it to a roomful of strangers; and some distinction of the sort was in his mind as he walked up and down. Honestly, he was a bit of a disappointment to himself. The fruit was hanging on the bough waiting to be plucked, yet something made him hesitate to stretch forth a hand. He had not realised that it was so difficult to have a good time, that even in taking one's pleasure one had to exercise some resolution.

A woman was standing at an open door in a dimly lighted side street as Sydney slowly wandered along the footpath. He looked at her from the corner of his eye as he passed, and then stood still irresolutely at the corner. She whistled gently, and he turned and strolled back again.

'Good night,' she said.

Sydney stopped and stared at the girl curiously. Her figure was silhouetted against the lighted passage; she seemed to be wearing a dull red dress with a shawl thrown round her shoulders. She was dark and slim, and her lips appealed to him.

'Are you looking for somebody?' she asked.

'Nobody in particular,' replied Sydney in a strange dry voice. His heart throbbed violently.

'It 's awfully cold,' she said, with a little shiver. 'Won't you come in for a bit?'

'I don't know,' said Sydney.

'I 've got some beer,' she added.

He considered her for a moment.

'Anybody else in?' he asked.

'Not a soul. Come and look for yourself.'

'All right,' he said, but for his very life he could not have taken a step forward.

'Aren't you coming, dear?' she asked plaintively.

He said 'Yes,' and did not move.

'Don't keep me waiting here, it 's too cold,' she complained.

'I don't think I 'll come in to-night,' he said hoarsely, looking at her lips. And before she had time to reply he started running as fast as he could run towards the main street where the tramcars were clanging. Her peal of laughter still rang in his ears as he turned the corner and found safety in the stream of foot passengers.

Hurrying back to his hotel, he went straight to bed and cried himself to sleep, and when he woke up in the morning the detectives were waiting for him.

# GREY

He sits all day at his desk in a corner of the warehouse. In front of him is a narrow window with many panes in it, and there is a grey film on the glass, for the window is seldom cleaned. The grey film hangs like a gauze curtain on a theatre stage, between him and the world; deadening the colours and blunting the fine edge of life. When the sunshine strikes down the narrow court between the cliffs of mellowed smoke-stained brick, the filmy panes rob it of its radiance, and only the pale ghost of sunshine filters through; sunshine with all the glory gone out of it. It is like sparkling yellow wine that one has poured into the glass and then left, untouched and forgotten. But, indeed, how should the light invade that dusky place? Pale ghosts seem to haunt it and put the day to flight. Once it was a dwelling-house, the mansion of some merchant prince, whose printed cottons floated leisurely round the Cape, bound for the marts of Delhi or Indore; whose flowered chintzes Emma Woodhouse might have hung over at the counter of Mrs. Ford's shop in Highbury. Heads, perhaps, were thrust from its windows when young Charles Edward clattered into the market-place on his road to Derby; and surely within its walls high festival marked Trafalgar and the humbled might of France and Spain.

The warehouse floor is worn and sunk in places. Uneven boards lie waiting to trip you up; and hard knots, too hard for countless feet to wear away, remain as polished knobs to catch the unwary toe. They have put iron pillars, white once but now a dingy grey, to support the floors, which groan beneath a weight they were not designed for; beneath piles of cloth fresh from the loom, and packages of bleached lawns whose snowy whiteness lies hidden under wrappings of coarse canvas. Stillages there are, too, row upon row of shelves loaded with greyish parcels whose sober colourings veil the dyed indigoes, the purples, the crimsons, and the emeralds rolled up within; colours too warm and vivid properly to be exposed in this faded region. Incandescent gas-lights burn here all day, even when the ghostly sun peeps in and shows up the thick grey dust on the desks; they too are dim and sickly because their mantles are shattered by the constant dropping of heavy bundles upon the floor above.

He sits at his desk gazing through the filmy panes into a curtain of pearly fog. The big leather books with their scarred soiled bindings are before him, and beneath his eyes are the serried rows of dry figures that stand for so much stock of woven goods, white, printed, and dyed, raised, stiffened, and glazed. But his eyes are not on the figures; he is looking out into the bank of fog, and there he sees dream-pictures.

Here, to this place, a rosy boy, his father brought him; fresh from school. They called him Johnny then. (They call him Johnny still.) He longed to go to sea, and spent his spare time in the corners of

the warehouse poring over Clark Russell, Marryat, and Ballantyne. The roar of the traffic at the mouth of the court was the roar of the Pacific surge in his ears ; and he watched the clouds sail westward over the coping of the warehouse opposite, reflecting enviously that in a few hours their shadows would be gliding over the Atlantic swell. The swish of water over rocks he heard always, and the curve of a shell-strewn bay was ever before his eye. He thought the most beautiful thing in the wide world would be a schooner wrecked on a coral reef, with the seabirds screaming round her slim spars, and her shadow on the firm white sand clearly defined by a tropic sun through fathoms of translucid water. He had never been aboard a ship in those days, but he seemed to know all about ships. The uneven warehouse floor was the swaying deck beneath his feet, and the dimnesses where goods were piled were to him the depths of the hold, where mutineers lie in chains and where one fires the powder-magazine.

But when he spoke of going to sea his father laughed. His family was bound by habit and tradition to office and mill, and he found none to sympathise with him. Later, when he was about twenty, his father died ; but then he was too old to go to sea. Also the warehouse held him fast in its grey grip, for his earnings were needed at home. At that time, too, he had come to look on that boyish longing as merely the fancy of a boy ; another longing had taken its place. To the colonies, to Canada, his fancy strayed. It seemed a life for a man out there, amongst the yellow grain ripening for the granaries of an empire. Or there came a vision of

prairie, and rounding up great herds of cattle on a bucking horse, and the glow of the camp fire after a hard day's work. Or great gorges in the mountains, mighty torrents gleaming through Titanic trunks, snow-clad heights, and the forests of fir. Any place, it seemed, where the wind blew freely across great open spaces; anything to get away from this prison where the air had all been breathed before, and the ghosts of the dead stood behind one's shoulder in the dusk of a grey winter afternoon. But his young sisters had to be provided for; and so he remained at the desk, and the grey dust settled down upon everything in the warehouse, and upon him too.

He began to think how pleasant it would be if he, like other men, could have a home of his own, a wife and children and cosy evenings by the fireside; but his sisters did not marry. They gave him a home, but it was not the home he dreamed of. When at last they found husbands and left him he was forty, a trusted servant of the firm, in charge of the warehouse. He was free at last. But the girls he had known once were all married long ago, and the girls he met now thought him middle-aged, dull, and faded. He thought of women, however, just as he had thought of places in his youth, when he selected coral islands in a southern sea and the peaks of the Cordilleras for his romances. A pleasant, homely body was no more to his taste now than Blackpool or life on a Cheshire farm would have been then. So that the women he wanted would not have him, and those whom he might have had he did not want. Other desires had gone from him; therefore the warehouse had him completely, and he went on

living comfortably enough in his dingy lodging in a street without character or beauty.

. . . . . .

As he sits at his desk looking into the fog and recalling all those old longings, one sees that his hair is thin on the top and going grey. The freshness in his face has departed, grey hollows are beginning to appear. The grey winter afternoon draws in; the fog grows greyer. The grey dust lies on the window-sill and on the desk. Everything is grey.

# REVOLT OF MR. REDDY

Mr. Reddy lived all day in a little wooden match-box of an office in the corner of the warehouse. He had lived there for over forty years; during which time he had been, man and boy, the faithful servant of Messrs. Mellish, Lindsay, and Brown of the Home Trade. The tall, deep-set window with many panes of glass in it, opposite which Mr. Reddy sat, looked out on to Merton Square; a staid commercial back-water which daily swelled with a flood of horses and lorries until high tide at noon, and daily ebbed until at about seven it was empty, and the cobble-stones were left high and dry for another night. If you passed through Merton Square most times of the day you would see Mr. Reddy behind the multitude of square panes, perched on a high stool doing something to fat leather ledgers, a quill pen behind his ear, his glasses pushed up on his wrinkled forehead, and his whole face puckered inconceivably with the strenuousness of his application. Or possibly, if business with Mellish, Lindsay, and Brown carried you through their narrow portal, you might see him standing near the goods' entrance at the end of the warehouse with a list in one hand and a lead pencil in the other. The goods' entrance was fashioned out of what had been the back door when the warehouse was the town house of some merchant prince

before the battle of Trafalgar; and against it every day innumerable lorries sheered up, and had a little gangway run across to them from the staging, exactly as if they had been vessels moored against a pier. Over the gangway burly men rolled trolleys laden with goods, and these Mr. Reddy inspected with a practised eye as they passed him. Sometimes, indeed, Mr. Reddy was not in the warehouse at all, but such occasions were rare. As a rule he went abroad only when Mrs. Lindsay, the senior partner's wife—there had been no Mellish in the firm ever since he could remember—called in her electric landaulette, and bore him off to make purchases for her at some of the wholesale houses in town. By this device goods needed by Mrs. Lindsay for her private use were passed through the books of the firm, and cost her no more than the wholesale price.

You will gather, then, that there was not much variety in Mr. Reddy's life. Oldish people, when they have been doing a thing in a certain way for a very long time, grow to value the way the thing is done as much as the actual accomplishment. With Mr. Reddy everything was done precisely and methodically; from the way the books were taken out of the safe to the way he chaffed the ancient waitress from his corner seat at the chop-house, everything was cut and dried. Probably the only thing that could have thrown Mr. Reddy off the rails would have been suspension of payment by Mellish, Lindsay, and Brown, but that was impossible. He had no boon companions and few acquaintances, and the only recreation he was known to take he took on the sixpenny side at the county cricket-

ground. The fact is Mr. Reddy was sure but had little enterprise; that was why he made such an excellent manager in the warehouse, where a stock-taking was the highest adventure that could be achieved. He was of course a bachelor. He was born to be a bachelor. Living at home with his mother and sister had been a habit with him, a habit which only their deaths interrupted. He substituted a landlady at once, and she came a habit too. Was there a romance in some corner of his life? It would be charming to think of a quiet grave garnished on anniversaries; but, alas! that dash of sentiment is denied us. He had never loved any one except himself, and he did not do that immoderately. No Scrooge was he. Merely a tame, respectable old gentleman who seemed to have been handed down with the warehouse and taken over by the firm as a fixture when it started business.

Mr. Reddy's behaviour on the day we have in view was therefore inexplicable. It was a purple patch in his career, and on the white flower of a blameless life a purple patch shows up with an effect exotic and altogether remarkable. On this particular day, after lunch at his accustomed chop-house where he chaffed the ancient waitress with the usual formulæ, Mr. Reddy did not go back to the warehouse. Instead, he made straight for the North-Western Hotel, where he could not possibly have any business, seated himself in the American bar, and ordered a Special Manhattan. He did this amazing thing with deliberation; it was evidently carefully thought out beforehand and matured. If you had met him crossing the town on his way to the hotel you would

have had no suspicion that he was doing anything unusual. The placid demeanour of the citizen going about his appointed business was in no way ruffled, yet who shall say what strange emotions were fermenting beneath that blameless exterior! When the young fellows at the warehouse spoke in his hearing about their sprees and their nights out, did his firmly closed mouth convey merely disapprobation? Was there not perhaps a hint of regret that these junketings had passed him by imperceptibly, a wistful longing to know what they were like, once, before he died? When young Mr. Lindsay turned up on Grand National mornings with a pair of field glasses slung over his light coat, and left early for the day, did Mr. Reddy's eye never follow him covetously as he sprang into the waiting taxi? If it did, nobody noticed; nobody would have looked for such a trait in Mr. Reddy, such a flaw, as it were, in his regular stratum of character. Yet how, save on the ground of an unsatisfied curiosity, a forty years' delayed desire for experience, are we to account for the fact that Mr. Reddy spent the afternoon in the American bar drinking cocktails at intervals of twenty minutes, timing himself carefully as if he were taking medicine in prescribed doses. He even had the precaution to bring an ample supply of small silver for convenience in paying, and in a separate pocket plenty of coppers for the tips. Further, it is a fact that at about half-past seven, after stropping the edge of his appetite with gin and Italian Vermouth, he sat down to a full Parisian dinner in the most expensive restaurant in the hotel. Circumstances prevented him from working right

through all the courses, but he managed to finish a pint of excellent champagne, he who had never before exceeded the modest limit of half a pint of stout, 'in a tankard, please.' Afterwards, the cloakroom attendant was unable to persuade him to accept anything but his umbrella; and armed with this, hatless and coatless, he endeavoured to gain access to a music-hall under the impression that his cloakroom ticket was a voucher for a reserved seat. Convinced at last that some exchange of cash was necessary, he flung down a sovereign, and obtained a place in the front row of the stalls; but he was moved almost to tears because the young lady at the box-office steadfastly declined to keep the change out of the sovereign, as he desired her to do. It must have been because he persisted in conducting the orchestra with his umbrella that he finally found himself flung into the street, where his dishevelled person was the first thing that caught the eye of young Mr. Lindsay as he came out of the Comedy Theatre with his fiancée and her sister. To say that Mr. Lindsay was astonished is not putting it strongly enough. This was one of those incredible affairs before which the mind is dumb; it was like the crumbling of a faith. Putting the ladies in the motor, and hastily muttering an apology, he returned to the side of Mr. Reddy and took him by the arm.

'What on earth are you doing here, Reddy?' he exclaimed. 'Pull yourself together, old chap!' Mr. Reddy shook himself free from the too familiar grasp of his employer. 'Haven't been warehouse since one o'clock,' he said, as if that explained everything. He put up the umbrella and began to dance

sedately, and a cheerful smile stole over his face as his feet beat the happy pavement.

Now, seeing that young Mr. Lindsay put Mr. Reddy into a hansom on the spot, it is difficult to explain why Mr. Plaisant, cashier to Messrs. Mellish, Lindsay, and Brown—a tall, grave, married man with a beard—was knocked up after midnight by a policeman in a four-wheeler, and invited to proceed to the police station to become bail for a gentleman. Such is the case, however; and Mr. Plaisant, insufficiently clad in an improvised costume, was the means of saving his colleague from having to spend the remainder of the night in the cells. Despite his monachal aspect Mr. Plaisant displayed a wealth of understanding and tolerance on this occasion.

The next morning Mr. Reddy was again absent from the warehouse for a time, but upon business of a different nature, and Mr. Plaisant accompanied him. '. . . A man of your age and respectable appearance,' said the magistrate, '. . . ought to know better . . . sorry to see you in this situation . . . hope it will be a lesson . . . half a guinea and costs.' And later on, when young Mr. Lindsay popped his head inside the match-box of an office and grinned, he said, 'Glad you got it over all right; Plaisant's told me. Don't let the Pater know, he mightn't like it. Mum 's the word!' Decidedly young Mr. Lindsay was a sport.

Did Mr. Reddy ever regret his moment of revolt? He pursued his peaceful career amongst the fat ledgers as placidly as a piece of machinery, and never again was Mr. Plaisant rung up in the night season

on his account. In his locked breast was that adventure a cherished memory or a gnawing sorrow ? Who shall say ? But when he overheard the lads in the dinner hour telling of last Saturday night, there was a subdued gleam in Mr. Reddy's eye that somehow spoke of understanding.

# A NOVEL

(Unfinished)

# LIFE

## CHAPTER I

### GEOGRAPHICAL

The noon express from St. Pancras was running into Salchester, and as the train swept under the bridge Maggie Heywood leaned forward in her seat in the third-class dining-car and surveyed the prospect thus suddenly revealed. Spread out in front of her was that small patch of the earth's surface upon which she had, almost continuously ever since she could remember, existed and worshipped; in the narrow limits of which were centred all her hopes, her fears, and her affections.

Ages ago all this flat expanse was subject to the Seymer, before that river shrank to the tiny trickle that makes one marvel, when one looks down upon it from the footbridge at Thompson's Crossing, that only forty miles away at Birkenspool its bosom should be broad enough to bear the mightiest of those vehicles that man's ingenuity has contrived to enable him to traverse the ocean surrounded by all the comforts of a first-class railway hotel. When the Seymer overflowed its banks in those days it transformed all these square miles into marsh, where the wild-fowl lurked in the sedges; now one controls

the Seymer with a two-foot dike, and directs its superfluous floods into neat little meadows where in the winter one may skate for sixpence with the certainty of encountering no worse a disaster than a wet ankle.

Maggie saw before her the margin of open country lying just outside the growing ring of a great city, the margin that will be absorbed in the next twenty years by the advancing edge of houses, as blotting-paper is absorbed by ink when you upset the ink-bottle. Within the memory of men yet living all this flat land was rural, not even suburban ; narrow lanes rambled about it from one farmhouse to another, occasional clumps of trees clustered about the bed of the Anson Brook as it wandered on to join the Seymer, but not an eminence was there in any direction to break the monotony of the level horizon. No highway passed through this country, because for a stretch of five miles there was no bridge across the Seymer, nothing from the one at Nayle, which carried the high road to Birkenspool and Chester, until you came to the one at Southenden and the main road to the south. Even now, in all that five miles, there was nothing to give you access into Cheshire except the iron footbridge at Thompson's Crossing, and that was of a date so recent that greybeards could tell of the days when the crossing was a crossing indeed, and old Thompson kept a boat at the inn on the Cheshire bank and ferried you across when you hailed him ; until one stormy night when, the boat being so leaky and Thompson so drunk, they both went to the bottom, and Thompson was drowned ignominiously in four feet

of water opposite his own front door. After that the footbridge was made, with a gate in the middle, so that you had to pay a halfpenny for the privilege of setting foot on Cheshire soil, unless you chose to go inside the inn and have a drink, when you were charged nothing at all for the bridge.

It must have been the rise of that surprisingly radical and ingenious device, the horse-tram, that first caused these solitudes to be developed. One of the bigger streets got pushed out of the houses, as it were, and the trams ran down it and turned round at the end, and a colony of new houses sprang up round the tram terminus, and the process was repeated time after time. For it is upon its system of intercommunication that a big town grows. Not that all these new houses were the shoddy dwellings that the electric tram somehow calls into being nowadays. The more leisurely horse-tram had its complement in the more leisurely semi-detached residence, and nobody—no matter how rich—who had business in the city thought of living anywhere else but a carriage drive away at the very farthest. Moreover, the southern edge of Salchester has always been the more fashionable; though you find, it is true, some big houses on the north at Kersley; but then at Kersley you are troubled by the smoke because of the prevailing winds. There was in particular, on this southern side of which we speak, a district of extreme exclusiveness and fashion some forty years ago. It was known, and still is, by the name of Manley Row, or more familiarly amongst its inhabitants as The Row, and here were congregated merchants of such importance that they could afford

not only a brougham to take them into town each morning, but even miniature grounds round their mansions, with drives and lodges at the gates. That was forty years ago. Where are those merchants now? They have gone to pleasanter and more picturesque surroundings, to Derbyshire or North Wales, whence they come in each morning on the express; to Alder's Cliff or Cranford among the Cheshire lanes. And with their migration the arrival of the motor-car had much to do.

Not all of those who work for their bread in Salchester, even though they be their own masters and proprietors of businesses, can afford lodges and carriage drives, and there sprang up near Manley Row a district socially its equal though financially its inferior. That district was called Prince's Park. About the time when it had been made thoroughly plain, through the writings of Mr. Samuel Smiles and similar philanthropists, that you would get more work out of your labouring class if you provided it with a little distraction or recreation, the Salchester City Council undertook the beneficent labour of providing a series of public parks for the people. As, however, owing to the high cost of the land, it was found almost impossible to provide the parks just where the people actually lived, several of them were constructed on the outskirts of the city; and amongst these was one in the neighbourhood of Manley Row, known as Prince's Park. It was called Prince's Park for the excellent reason that just before it was opened Albert Edward, Prince of Wales (afterwards called to the Throne and known as Edward the Peacemaker), was mercifully restored

to convalescence after an attack of diphtheria, amidst the ceremonious thanksgivings of a devout and loyal nation; and it occurred to the authorities that there could be no better way of handing down to posterity the emotions evoked on this historic occasion than by naming the acres of tiny shrubs, the avenue of immature limes, and the tulip-beds, after His Royal Highness.

At the time it was made Prince's Park was not very much use to the people, because the people had to take a horse-tram to get to it; and with the fare that one would have to pay on the horse-tram one could buy, if one went to the right place, as much as a pint of beer. (It is only fair to say that the development of the city has carried the people within reach of the park, and has given to the thriftiness of that old City Council the air of a wise foresight and provision for the future.) But for all that Prince's Park was not wasted. That quite desirable though less ostentatious residential district which sprang up near Manley Row took the fullest advantage of it; and instead of the people the comfortable middle-class householder, rented at about fifty pounds a year, looked out from his windows upon its pretty shrubs, and walked through its lime avenue each morning on his way to the horse-tram. And Prince's Park, Salchester, made quite a good address.

As time went on the magnificence began to depart from Manley Row, as it does from all things human; and the large houses began to stand empty for long periods with an ever-growing frequency. The wealthy merchants had sought their fresh retreats farther out

of town, and no successors could be found who would undertake the maintenance of such heavy establishments, even though the rents were lowered to a ruinous level in order to tempt them. Then came the opportunity of the speculative builder. Gradually, here and there, a mansion would fall into the hands of the housebreakers, its grounds would be cut up into small plots, and its bricks and stones would be used for the foundations and inner walls of the more modest and yet eminently respectable residences which arose upon the site. Manley Row might be said to have met its Waterloo when the famous Manley Row cricket-ground, which had supplied so many amateurs to the Lancashire eleven, at last shared a similar fate; when its shattered pavilion gaped open to all the winds, and the turf was rolled up into neat little packets to be borne away to furnish forth the new ground out on the other side of Prince's Park Railway Station, and the preliminary excavations for cellars began to dot its surface. But still the district preserved the pleasant character which its abundant trees and foliage had always given it. The trees were spared by the builders as far as possible, and great elms which had towered over high stone walls now prolonged a useful if less glorious existence inside tiny iron ring-fences at the edge of the footpaths. Because of its vegetation Manley Row was still an agreeable place in the hot summer days, even if it was—as its detractors maintained—rather damp in the winter. And now, at the beginning of the reign of George v., there was very little difference between Manley Row and Prince's Park, except this matter of

vegetation, the row being well-wooded and the park district almost without a tree save those within the park itself. And curiously enough, though not a mile separated the heart of the one district from the heart of the other, you noticed a distinct alteration in the atmosphere, in the temperature, in your mood even, when you passed from the open roads of Prince's Park into the secluded sheltered roads of the row. It was stuffier, and sentimental associations clustered in the Row, as you thought of the big houses departed, and marked those still left, where the girls once played croquet in crinolines, and the merchants came home at night with the latest news from the Crimea. Across Prince's Park the east wind swept healthily along the Egerton Road as far as Chiltern-with-Manby, and life seemed brisker. No other war than the South African had ever stirred the heart of Prince's Park.

Long before this, of course, the horse-trams had been replaced by the electric trams. They were not ornamental, with their overhead wires, but they were the best in the world. Visitors from Salchester would complain scornfully that the lights went out when the London trams crossed the points, and that the Paris trams made you sea-sick because the lines were so badly laid; and they were perfectly justified in their comparisons. The ideal thing in Salchester was to live near enough to the trams to be able to use them with convenience, and far enough away from them to be free from the annoyance of the clanging bells and the jangling across the points. When a new line was laid down a road, that road instantly depreciated in the general esteem, and the

property in it depreciated in value. Both Manley Row and Prince's Park were admirably situated in this respect. The trams came up Prince's Road as far as the park gates, passing only shops on the way, and turned past the Conservative Club up Scarborough Road to the very edge of the Row ; but no farther. They might not enter these desirable paradises of the comfortable middle class, it seemed. At least, so it had seemed until lately, but now queer rumours had got about that the Tramways Committee was contemplating an extension right up the residential portion of Prince's Road, and even a farther extension from the end of Prince's Road along the Egerton Road as far as Chiltern-with-Manby, which would be most unfortunate, since it might be expected to spoil the Egerton Road as a promenade, and even lead to the erection of small property of an undesirable character. The topic was much discussed at afternoon tea, and there was some talk of a petition being presented to the Council against the scheme, and at least one municipal election was fought on it. The Egerton Road was crowded each Sunday at Church Parade, though very little used at other times.

As Maggie Heywood looked forth from the window of the train, it was the newest and farthest extension of Prince's Park that caught her eye. Lying more to the north were the older part of the park and the district of Manley Row, and on the northern horizon was the delicate fringe of chimneys topped by a haze of smoke that marked the city itself. Close under the train was the new Manley Row cricket-ground, looking very smart with its ring of new

fencing, and the neat new pavilion, the ladies' tennis pavilion, the shed in which lived the horse who pulled the roller, and the scoring-board and sight-boards. Green, the groundsman, was engaged in rolling the pitch, and presently he would be putting up the practice nets in readiness for the young men who would shortly be home from the city. Maggie wondered whether Bobby, her brother, would be turning up for practice that evening. The train thundered through the little suburban station, which nobody ever used because the trams were more convenient and cheaper, and past the grove of trees which clustered about the Anson Brook just here and gave the station a pleasantly rural aspect; and Maggie wondered whether the brook had begun to smell yet, as it invariably did in the hot weather. In the hot weather the brook rivalled the trams as a topic of conversation, and it was a question whether the factories which polluted it higher up in its course could not be prosecuted; or at least whether the corporation could not be forced to culvert the length of the stream which lay near to respectable dwellings, in order to hide the noisome scent from the nose of man.

Just behind the station, through the trees, Maggie could see for a moment the newish red-brick houses of Argyll Road, lying just off Prince's Road, farthest outposts of Salchester on the south side. It was here that Maggie lived, and for a moment she regretted that the express ran right through to the Midland Station in Salchester without stopping at Prince's Park. It was annoying to pass so near to one's home and to be unable to get out. But then she thought with pleasure of the taxi drive out from the city,

and of her new trunk of yellow compressed cane which would be perched by the side of the chauffeur, incommoding him as they drove up into Argyll Road. If she had got out at the station her trunk would have been brought home by a boy on a trolley, perhaps to the back gate, and it looked well for people to see you coming home with a trunk; there was none of that suggestion of a measly week-end about a trunk which a portmanteau conveyed. She had been no less than three weeks in London, or to be more precise, in Wimbledon, and she was rather proud of it. It had been nice of her cousin Alice to have her for so long, though to be sure she had made herself very useful, for it was not long since Alice had had her baby, and of course she wasn't very strong yet. Still, three weeks in London sounded well, and Violet Brady, who lived on the opposite side of Argyll Road, had only been to London with her father and mother during Whit-Week.

Maggie wondered, as the train slipped past Chiltern-with-Manby and plunged amongst warehouses and mills rising like boulders amongst the seething slums, whether there would be any one to meet her at the Midland Station. It would be too early for Bobby to get away from Barley Brothers, but her father, who had a business of his own, might be there, unless he had been detained on the Royal Exchange. Looking down from the viaduct upon a row of ramshackle advertisement-plastered dwellings with their filthy shattered windows, Maggie rather hoped that there would be no one, so that she could order the porters and chauffeurs about for herself. And as

they ran alongside the platform, and she lowered the pane and put out her head, she was almost pleased to recognise nobody in the crowd which stood waiting for the train. Then she observed the Rev. Harold Simon, the pastor of the Manley Row Wesleyan Chapel; he was a tall, fine-looking, determined young man of about thirty-one, with a dark brown moustache, and his broad shoulders stood out above those of the people round him. Maggie idly asked herself whom Mr. Simon could be meeting, and it occurred to her that his sister Miss Agatha might possibly be on the train, though in that case it was certainly strange that she hadn't seen her in the dining-car. And then she forgot all about Mr. Simon in the excitement of alighting and looking after her luggage.

'Good afternoon, Maggie; so here you are back again in dirty old Salchester.'

Maggie, who was trying to force her way through the crush surrounding the luggage-van, found Mr. Simon at her side. She greeted him kindly.

'No one else here to meet you?'

'I suppose they think I 'm big enough to look after myself.'

'Tell me which is your trunk.'

'That big yellow one, with M.H. on the end.'

'I see. I 'll look after it for you.'

'Please don't trouble.'

'No trouble at all.'

'But aren't you . . . I mean, haven't you come to meet somebody?'

'Yes.' Mr. Simon smiled in his open way.

'Then aren't I keeping you?'

'No. I came to meet *you*.'

'Me?' Maggie stared at him, and then remembered her manners. 'It 's awfully kind of you. But how did you know I should be on this train?'

'Your mother told me.'

'Oh.'

Mr. Simon grabbed at a passing porter, and presently they were rolling up City Road and Great Johnson Street in the taxi-cab. All the time Mr. Simon was talking pleasantly about matters of general interest, and Maggie was answering perfunctorily, hardly listening, wondering how it was that Mr. Simon should have done such a strange thing as to come and meet her at the station. It was true that it seemed the most natural thing in the world. Mr. Simon was such a simple, straightforward man that whatever he did seemed natural, and he was not now in the least embarrassed. If he had hesitated and searched for something to say now and then Maggie might have suspected that he was wanting to make love to her, but his confident and kind manner put any such suspicion out of her head. Besides, Mr. Simon was the minister of the chapel which Maggie attended; and though she was aware that Wesleyan ministers fell in love and became engaged and married like the rest of mankind, she could hardly imagine them going about the business in the same way as a lay member of the body would go about it.

'Isn't it nice to be home again?' said Mr. Simon. 'I always think that the best part of going away is the home-coming.'

Now Maggie had been thinking how mean and sordid

the South Salchester streets appeared after the Strand and Bond Street, when she was not thinking about Mr. Simon's reason for meeting her, and as he put this question she looked out on Prince's Park on the left hand and thought what a poor affair it was after Hyde Park, and she looked out on the villas on the right hand and compared them to their disadvantage with the villas on Wimbledon Hill. But she did not say so. On the contrary she said, 'Yes, indeed, it *is* nice to be home again.'

She said this because though Mr. Simon was on quite familiar terms with her family, she considered him her father's friend rather than her own, and she felt it would be rude not to pretend she liked to be back again in Salchester after he had so unaccountably come to meet her. But she noted, as they turned into Argyll Road, that the houses looked smaller than they used to, and that the patch of waste land at the corner, with the broken-down wall that the errand boys were gradually pulling to pieces, was almost an eyesore.

When the chauffeur had carried the trunk up to the front door, Mr. Simon paid him. Maggie had her purse in her hands.

'Oh, Mr. Simon, I can't let you pay.'

'Please,' he said, as he took her hand and shook it warmly; 'please.'

'Won't you come in? I dare say there 'll be some tea.'

'Not to-day, thanks. I shall see you again soon. Perhaps to-morrow.'

Raising his hat he strode away, leaving Maggie more puzzled than ever. Mrs. Heywood had been

in the back garden cutting sweet-peas, and had not noticed the arrival of the taxi. She kissed Maggie on both cheeks and said how well she looked, and wondered how it was that Mr. Heywood hadn't managed to meet the train and come home with her in the taxi.

'Mr. Simon came to meet me.'

'Did he? That was very kind of him.' Maggie noticed that her mother did not seem at all surprised. 'Didn't you ask him in?'

'He wouldn't stay for tea.'

Mrs. Heywood nodded sagely. 'Your father has something to talk to you about when he comes home to-night.'

Her tone was mysterious, and Maggie became rather alarmed, and tried to recollect whether she had done anything while she had been away that her father might disapprove of. She could not think of anything except two or three visits to theatres in London, and although Mr. Heywood was not very favourably inclined towards the theatre, he could hardly be said to disapprove of it.

'What do you mean, mother?'

'Mr. Simon wants to marry you, my dear.'

'Marry me!' said Maggie. 'Mr. Simon!'

## CHAPTER II

Bobby got home at about quarter to six, said 'Hello, Maggie!' bolted his tea, and rushed off to cricket practice as she had expected he would do. Mr. Heywood got home rather later, asked Maggie a lot of questions about London, and took very much longer over his tea. Maggie asked her mother whether the brook had begun to smell, and found that it hadn't yet, but was expected to do so every day now that the weather was so much warmer. Mrs. Heywood also said that she had heard definitely that they were going to bring the trams up to the junction of Prince's Road and Egerton Road before the autumn. It seemed to Maggie that nothing else had happened during her absence, except of course this new wild surprise about Mr. Simon. She grew impatient.

'Father, Mr. Simon met me at the station.'

'All right, my dear. Let me get my tea over first. Did he say anything to you?'

'No; but he paid my fare.'

'Well, he 'll have the privilege of doing that very often in the future, let us hope.'

Maggie did not reply, and waited patiently until Mr. Heywood had finished his tea, reflecting upon his evident desire that she should receive Mr. Simon's attentions favourably.

After tea they all three went into the back garden and sat in the shade of the striped red and white tent, Mr. Heywood first looking over the wall to make sure that the Jessels were not out in their garden, for it would hardly do to have the conversation overheard. Then he went over the whole affair, and told how Mr. Simon had spoken to him about it, and how he had promised to put it to Maggie. Mr. Heywood was a reserved man, and when he spoke he spoke briefly and to the point, and in his quiet way he mentioned the advantages that might be expected from a marriage with Mr. Simon.

'Of course a Wesleyan minister is not too well paid, Maggie, but Mr. Simon has some private means. He has told me exactly how he is situated, and on the whole I think that you might very easily do worse than marry him. Then, again, he is very popular and well-liked as a preacher; he is sure to get on and become one of the best-known men in the connexion.'

'He will probably be President of the Conference before he dies,' said Mrs. Heywood, stroking back some untidy ends of fluffy hair. It occurred to Maggie, looking at her mother after an absence of three weeks, that Mrs. Heywood's hair always was untidy, and that she was always pushing it back into place with the tips of her fingers. She had always done it, yet Maggie saw that she had never really noticed the trick before. She looked away at her father, who was sharpening the end of a wooden match with his penknife in order to pick his teeth. She was conscious of a certain annoyance, and stared hard at the row of sweet-peas in front of the tent

so that she would not see him perform the operation. Jim, cousin Alice's husband, did not pick his teeth at all in public. She wondered whether Mr. Simon would do so after they were married if she decided to accept him.

'But, father, why didn't Mr. Simon propose to me?'

'No doubt he thought that under the circumstances it might be better to speak to me first.'

'The circumstances?'

'Being our minister, and a personal friend of my own——'

'Yes, I see. I must admit that I 've never thought of Mr. Simon in that way at all. He hasn't ever seemed to care for me in that way, either.'

'My dear Maggie,' said Mrs. Heywood, chasing an unruly wisp of fluffy hair, 'you couldn't expect a man in Mr. Simon's position to behave like one of the boys of the neighbourhood.'

'Why not?'

'He has his reputation to think of. It would never do for people to say he was in the habit of flirting with girls at the chapel.'

'He could have let me see that he was fond of me without any danger of such things being said.'

'You must allow him to be the best judge of that, Maggie.'

Mr. Heywood lighted his pipe and smoked placidly whilst his wife and daughter continued the argument. He admired and respected Mr. Simon, and was prepared to be very considerably influenced by him in spite of his youth, by virtue of the official position he held. Yet Mr. Heywood was not a man who

would try and force Maggie to marry anybody she did not want to marry, and he could not help feeling —though not by any means a man well acquainted with the world—that Mr. Simon had in this case carried correctness almost to the point of coldness.

John Heywood was a man who did nothing unexpected. He had been put into a little yarn agency business by his father as a young man, and his industry and probity had enabled him to make a decent living out of it, but his lack of imagination and enterprise had prevented his ever doing anything more. He had married the rather pretty and gentle girl, who was now Mrs. Heywood, without any violent passion, because something of the sort was expected of most young men of his age. He had been brought up a Wesleyan by his parents, and had never had the idea of being anything else, though it is true that he had not been an enthusiastic class member, nor had he held office at the chapel. But that, too, was no doubt owing to his lack of imagination. He had brought up his two children, Maggie and her younger brother Bobby, as he had been brought up himself, in the dull atmosphere of the home; and had trusted to its influence to shield them against the evils that swarmed in the world outside, but had not otherwise troubled to warn them against those evils. In consequence he knew absolutely nothing about what his children really felt or thought on any important subject; they were as foreign to him as if they had been Hottentots or Japanese. They formed their own conclusions and kept quiet about them. It is true that they formed those conclusions rather more slowly than they would

have done in a livelier household, though after he left school and went to Barley Brothers' office in the city, Bobby shot ahead most remarkably in this respect. Maggie was still, for a girl of twenty-three, singularly without any clear or definite opinions about life, herself, and things in general. She was, however, conscious of an undercurrent of emotions that could hardly be accounted for, emotions that sometimes tried to find expression in ways that were not quite convenient. She would have liked to talk about these things, but she had no congenial friends, only girl acquaintances, and of course one could not talk about them to one's relatives.

Just now, although her mind ought by rights to have been fully occupied by the surprising behaviour of the Rev. Harold Simon, there was mingled with the pleasant glow of excitement which that behaviour had evoked a queer emotion of irritation with both her father and her mother. It annoyed her; she knew that it was not right or natural to be irritated in this way by her parents, who were behaving in a perfectly normal and usual manner; moreover, she knew that she ought to be more absorbed by the offer of Mr. Simon. But as she thought about it, whilst her mother went on talking and dabbing at her hair with her finger-tips and her father continued to smoke his pipe, she realised that she was not excited by Mr. Simon's offer because she was not interested enough in him to want to become his wife, and also she realised that she was annoyed by her parents just because they *were* as normal and usual as ever they were. Her parents, she discovered with the suddenness of a revelation, were very ordinary

people, not at all like the brilliant and cultivated persons who inhabited the villas on Wimbledon Hill. She supposed it was because her parents were provincials, and it struck her with rather the effect of a cold douche that she herself was a provincial too. So was Bobby, so were all the inhabitants of Argyll Road, of Salchester even. Certain splendid ones there were, who were less provincial, who talked of London as 'Town,' and went there when they felt inclined, and who when in Salchester dined and spent a good deal of their time at the new Central Hotel near the Midland Station. If one could be of such as those, even . . .

'And I 'm sure he is extremely devoted to you, Maggie, though no doubt he isn't the kind of man who would wish to show it too much until he was sure that it would be returned.'

Maggie gathered that her mother was still talking about Mr. Simon, and had a guilty feeling that it was almost indecent of her to have forgotten him altogether after he had been so kind as to wish to marry her.

'It is true that at the end of his time, in another couple of years that is, he will be moved to another circuit. That would mean that we should lose you ; but you may be sure that he will get an important chapel, for, as your father says, he is the kind of energetic young minister the Wesleyan Church is so much in need of now ; and wherever he goes your position as his wife will ensure you the greatest prominence, socially, and in every way, in the Body.'

(The 'Body,' in Nonconformist circles, means the members of that particular church, community, or

connexion to which the speaker belongs. When a person is referred to as 'a very big man in the Body,' the reference is to his standing with his fellow-members, not to his physical peculiarities.)

'I don't think I love Mr. Simon,' said Maggie slowly.

Mr. Heywood said nothing. He was aware that it is not at all necessary for people to be in love to have a very happy and comfortable life together. He was aware of this because of his own married experience, but he said nothing, because it would have seemed rather brutal to mention such a fact, especially before his wife. Mrs. Heywood said, 'Oh, Maggie,' in a grieved tone that expressed regret that Maggie could not see her way to love at short notice such a nice man as Mr. Simon.

'Does he love me?'

'Evidently, or he wouldn't want to marry you,' replied Mrs. Heywood quickly, skating over the subject as lightly as possible and getting away from it, for at the bottom of her heart she had an uncomfortable idea that it was perhaps hardly decent for a Wesleyan minister to love anybody except his God.

'I don't think I want to marry Mr. Simon.'

Mrs. Heywood sank back in her chair with a sigh, and her husband knocked out his pipe and got up.

'Very well, my dear,' he said, 'that 's settled. I 'll see Mr. Simon about it.'

'Where are you going, John?'

'I shall stroll round to the cricket-ground and watch the practice. Will you come with me, Maggie?'

'Yes,' said Maggie, not because she expected there

would be anything amusing at the cricket-ground, but because she wanted to avoid the cloud of gentle reproaches which she saw gathering in her mother's eye. The cricket-ground bored her, except on a fine Saturday. She was not fond of tennis, and preferred to sit in a deck-chair near the pavilion and watch the cricket, though she cared as little for cricket as for tennis. It was the men she liked to look at, not the game. But somehow it was not the men she knew whom she liked to look at : Bobby, nor Alfred and Ritchie Brady, nor even Francis Lavigne, the popular captain of the First Eleven. These she had known as boys, and they did not interest her. It was the strange men on the visiting elevens to whom she was introduced on fine Saturdays, and who would bring her tea, and squat on the grass beside her deck-chair, and talk when their side was batting. It pleased her to look at their faces burnt by the sun, and the glimpse of sun-burnt chest visible where the top two or three buttons of their shirts had been left unfastened, and to wonder what they were really like under their pleasant manner and their polite chaff. She would have found the same pleasure in dances, but the Heywood's circle was not one that went in for dances very much.

When Maggie and Mr. Heywood entered the ground through the little gate cut in the wooden fence, Bobby was standing at the door of the pavilion with his pads on, for he had just finished batting. As they strolled round Maggie observed that he was holding a glass of beer in his hand, but Mr. Heywood did not see Bobby at all. Suddenly Bobby caught sight of his father and disappeared within

the pavilion, whence he presently emerged bearing a blameless ginger-beer. His father had never forbidden him to drink alcohol, but Bobby felt that it was better not to let him know that he did so, although he was now a tall boy of twenty.

'Hallo, father! Have some ginger-beer?'

'No, thanks.'

'There 's some beer if you 'd rather have it,' said Bobby, in a tone which implied that he could not possibly understand how anybody ever could prefer the beastly stuff. Maggie laughed in his face, but Bobby did not mind. He knew that Maggie had seen him, but she would not give him away.

'George,' said Bobby, turning to a figure which loomed in the whiteness of flannels in the interior of the dark pavilion, 'let me introduce you to my father and sister. This is George Fergusson; you 've heard me speak of him.'

George Fergusson came forward into the light, and Maggie took him in with one of her appraising glances, and dismissed him hastily as not particularly interesting. He was not above middle height, for one thing, and she liked tall, slim men; and then he wore glasses. Only eyeglasses, it was true, but still glasses. However, he was glad to meet her, and he tried very hard to show it; his lively eyes gleamed brightly under the glasses, and his ruddy round face, with its closely-shaven dark chin, shone with pleasure. As they walked up and down on the grass she saw that he must be about thirty. His hair was a neat and glossy black, and his figure was much more burly and powerful than she had at first thought. He pleased her a little better, and when

he heard where she had just come back from, he began to talk about London and said how fond he was of it.

'I try and get up at least once every year, to have a look at what 's going on and do a few theatres.'

'You like going to theatres ? '

'Very much. Don't you ? '

'Oh yes, but I don't get many chances. Father and mother hardly ever go, and Bobby goes off to music-halls with his friends.'

'Get him to take you.'

'To a music-hall ? '

'Why not ? They are the most respectable kind of theatre nowadays.'

'I wouldn't mind. In fact I 'd love to go, but I don't know what father would say.'

'He lets you go to the ordinary theatres ? '

'We go to the Shakespeare production at the Queen's every winter, and to F. R. Benson, and sometimes to the Repertory Theatre, but they do such queer things at times that father is rather chary of taking me there. I imagine he 's afraid of hearing something he might be ashamed of.'

'You went to theatres in London ? '

'Jim took me three times. We went to the Haymarket, and Daly's, and of course to His Majesty's. Don't you love Tree ? '

George Fergusson smiled in rather a superior way.

'Tree ? Well, one used to like Tree, but isn't he rather exploded nowadays ? '

'Is he ? I didn't know. But how do you manage to find time to get away so often ? '

'I 'm in a bank, you see, and we have three weeks'

holiday every year. I take a few days early in the spring, if I can manage it, and the rest late in the autumn.'

'Yes. What bank are you in?'

'Persse's. The head office in Morley Street.'

'That 's father's bank, isn't it?'

'Yes; I 've often seen your father come in, but I 've never met him because I 'm not on the counter.'

'I suppose you 're awfully good at cricket?'

'Me? No, I 'm no good, but it 's a fine exercise.'

'Rot,' said Bobby. 'Don't you believe him. He's quite useful. He made twelve not out last week for the Second. He 's playing at home on Saturday; you 'd better come and see for yourself.'

George laughed. He was glad to appear a skilful cricketer in the eyes of Miss Heywood.

'I 've never seen you up here before,' said Mr. Heywood.

'No. I 've only just joined the club. I 've come to live in Manley Row.'

'Whereabouts?'

'Brantwood Road. Lodgings, you know. I 've found quite a decent landlady, for a change.'

'I 'm very glad to have met you,' said Mr. Heywood, as they shook hands. 'You must get Bobby to bring you round to the house some night. It 's lonely for a young man living in lodgings.'

'Thanks very much,' said George, looking at Maggie.

George Fergusson thought a good deal about Maggie that night. Her slim firm figure and dark eyes attracted him, and he felt that there was a fire in those eyes at present merely limpid which might

be roused by conversation other than that consisting of polite commonplaces. His own lively beady eyes glistened as he thought of her well-marked arched brows and the way her crisp dark hair sprang away from her temples and clung round the nape of her neck. Her lips, too, were well cut, firm, and red. Altogether a determined young woman, well worth getting to know better.

Maggie, on the other hand, hardly thought anything about George Fergusson, except that here was another of those people who were civilised enough to understand the dullness of Salchester and the superior attractions of the capital. His conversation had merely accentuated the dissatisfaction she had felt when she came once again to the mean streets of Salchester, the familiar rooms at home with the worn furniture, the high tea so disagreeable after the smart little dinners at Alice's. She lay in bed that night thinking, in the clean unattractive room in which she had slept for over ten years, ever since they had moved out to Argyll Road from Scarborough Road, and she wondered how much longer she would have to sleep in it. She wanted a room like cousin Alice's, with a dressing-table that glittered with silver brushes and mirrors and countless little bottles, and a wonderful wardrobe with shallow trays and cunning contrivances for hanging clothes without crushing them. She remembered that tomorrow she would slip into her old life at home, that she would help Mary, the maid, to make the beds, and would then help her mother to make the pastry for the week-end ; that in the afternoon she would probably go down the road to the shops to

buy some flowers and change a book at the circulating library; and that in the evening she would sit in the garden and read until it grew too dark and she had to come indoors, when she would have the choice of continuing to read or going to bed. She did not know how she would be able to endure all that again. She wanted life, movement, excitement. She wanted London. She thought of the taxi drive that morning from Waterloo to St. Pancras, and the glimpse of the river from Waterloo Bridge, with the great hotels looming over the Embankment, and the towers of the Abbey and the Houses of Parliament in the distance. It had thrilled her so. She wished she could dine at the Savoy in one of those broad windows which overlooked the river. Jim had taken her twice to dine out before the theatre, once to the Pall Mall Restaurant and once to a little place in Soho, and she called gratefully to mind the lights and the people, the waiters, the flowers and fruit, and the smell of good food, and the champagne bottles leaning in a languid way against the sides of the coolers, as if they were used to that sort of life and couldn't bother to stand up straight. Would she ever be bored by that sort of life? It didn't seem possible. She recalled that the taxi had been blocked in Wellington Street, at the corner of the Strand, and that she had glanced up and down the famous busy street and at the Lyceum Theatre opposite with a horrid sinking at heart because she was swiftly leaving it all. She wanted London. She wanted money, plenty of it. Or if not London, anywhere else than Argyll Road; and if not a lot of money, a little to be going on with. If only she

had a hundred pounds or so she might run away and try to make some sort of a living for herself in London. Did Bobby ever have ideas like these? She didn't know, but she knew that Bobby had a chance of gratifying such desires if he experienced them, whereas she, unaided, could do nothing but endure. Oh for something, for somebody to take her out of the rut she had been in all her life, the rut she was about to fall into once more!

Then with a shock she awoke, for she was almost asleep, and she said to herself suddenly, 'Why not marry Mr. Simon?'

She had completely forgotten, in her misery and self-pity, that she had received a proposal of marriage during the day. Of course, it was not surprising that it should have made so little impression on her, couched as it was in the cold irrelevance of a message delivered by a third person; it might have moved her much more, in spite of its unexpectedness, if Mr. Simon had said a few broken words in the taxi. She had actually noted the fact that she was invited to marry as coolly as she would have noted an invitation to afternoon tea, and having noted it she returned to the contemplation of her own private woes. It never occurred to her to put the two things together until this moment. She did not love Mr. Simon, that was certain. But once ignore that fact, look at the advantages marriage with him would ensure! She would get away from home and the old life; that was the most important advantage. She would have a house of her own, money of her own (she remembered Mr. Simon's private means); she would at once take a position in chapel circles

inferior to none; she would be a more important person than her own mother. Then in a couple of years Mr. Simon would be moved to another circuit, and there was no knowing where he might not go; perhaps to a fashionable watering-place, even to London itself. She did not love him, but he was a fine-looking, vigorous man, with a personality not at all unpleasing. She liked him, and might easily get to like him very much more. It was merely because she had never thought of the minister of her own chapel in intimate relations with herself that this marriage had seemed impossible to her when first it was proposed. But a Wesleyan minister was a man like all other men; strip away the cloth and you found the human being. True, there might be duties she would have to perform; there were duties of course, but they would be performed with all the authority of her position behind them; they would be pleasant to perform. It wouldn't be like helping Mary to make the beds. She would think about it in the morning. She fell asleep.

She got down to breakfast before Bobby, and found her father and mother at the table.

'Father, I think I should like to marry Mr. Simon, after all.'

'My dear!' said Mrs. Heywood, her eyes beginning to fill as she gazed lovingly at Maggie, pushing back some stray wisps of hair at the same time. 'Last night I prayed that you might be moved to alter your mind.'

Maggie did not reply, but she noticed her mother cutting the loaf with the fingers that had so recently been rearranging the untidy hair, and was more

glad than ever that she had decided to marry Mr. Simon.

'Very well,' said Mr. Heywood, 'that 's settled. I 'll see Mr. Simon about it to-day.'

And began to fashion a toothpick out of a match before rising from the table.

## CHAPTER III

On the following morning the Rev. Harold Simon received a letter from Mr. Heywood, written from the office upon the notepaper of John Heywood and Co. He read it through at breakfast with attention, and put it beside his plate until he had finished; but whilst he was eating he thought a good deal about it, and he frequently observed his sister Agatha who sat opposite to him.

Mr. Simon and his sister lived together in the official residence of the pastors of the Manley Row Wesleyan Chapel, a tall, narrow old house in a block of four such houses, with long narrow strips of gardens in front of them, a long way down Willingdon Road. They were rather agreeable old houses of mellow red brick, and the situation was reasonably agreeable too, for here the Willingdon Road still preserved some of the amenities that it gained from its proximity to Manley Row; it had not yet plunged into the area of mean shops and public-houses which it afterwards traversed on its way to the centre of the city. There were tall, narrow old trees, even, in the gardens.

Miss Agatha was about a couple of years older than her brother, and she had kept house for him ever since he had entered the ministry and had had a house of his own to keep. She kept house very

well; she was one of those women who would have made admirable wives if they had not been definitely marked out from birth to be old maids. Already, at little over thirty, she was developing a sort of angular primness that went well with the tall, narrow house in Willingdon Road, and the position of housekeeper to the pastor of a Wesleyan Chapel. She had the undecided straw-coloured hair of her brother, as well as the high cheek-bones which would presently, when the flesh fell away from them a little more, assume an aspect almost gaunt. In Mr. Simon's case his dark moustache lent a contrast to his fair hair, and seemed to indicate a strength lacking in Miss Agatha, but those who imagined that her placid demeanour was a sign of weakness of character were much mistaken. She was a quiet woman who held on to a thing with the tenacity of a limpet, for as long as she thought it right to hold on. In fact, if we can imagine a limpet imbued with a strong moral sense we get a good idea of Miss Agatha's temperament.

Miss Agatha rose from the table as soon as she saw that Mr. Simon had finished, and picking up the *Salchester Guardian* glanced at the last page to see who was dead, who was married, and to whom a child had been born. This was her invariable custom every morning.

'Just fancy, Harold, only two deaths to-day, and nearly half a column of weddings!'

The subject was one which occupied Mr. Simon's own thoughts at the moment, and he started guiltily like one who has been surprised in the act of doing something not quite honourable. However, he had

enough self-control to make a remark typical of one who, as pastor of souls, might be expected to possess a kindly humour as well as an acquaintance with the poets.

'In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love,' said Mr. Simon.

'You, too, are still a young man, Harold.'

'Er . . . yes.'

Mr. Simon got up and went to the window, and gazed through the open window down the garden. Early as it was the morning sun blazed down with an intense stillness that gave promise of another glorious day.

'Agatha, what would you say if I told you one of these mornings that I thought of getting married?'

'Are you thinking of getting married?'

'Would you be surprised?'

'I have been expecting you to say something of the sort every morning for years.'

'Agatha!'

'No, dear, that is not a reproach. I only mean that I have recognised, all the time that I have lived with you, that some day you would get married. I have always understood that this happy time we have spent together could not last for ever, and that some day I should have to make way for your wife. I suppose that you are trying to tell me that that day has come now. You mustn't be afraid of hurting me, Harold.'

'My dear Agatha——'

'Who is she, Harold? Of course she must be one of the girls at the chapel.'

'Miss Heywood.'

'Maggie Heywood? Yes. The Heywoods are a good old Wesleyan family. I am only surprised because I never had the least idea . . . you have kept so very quiet about her.'

'Perhaps I have. I'm not one to talk much, Agatha.'

'And she has accepted you?'

Mr. Simon silently handed Mr. Heywood's letter to his sister.

'MEMORANDUM FROM JOHN HEYWOOD & CO.

'16A BACK MORLEY STREET,
SALCHESTER, *June 2nd.*

'DEAR MR. SIMON,—With reference to the conversation we had the other day concerning my daughter Maggie, I have spoken to her about the matter, and I am very pleased to say that she views it in the most favourable light. It came as a complete surprise to her, and she naturally wanted a little time to think it over, but this morning she came to me and said that she would be happy to be your wife. Can you spare time to come up to the house this evening? I think that it would be as well if you had an interview with Maggie at once.

'I need not say that this is the source of the greatest happiness to Mrs. Heywood and myself.

'Trusting to see you this evening, I am yours very sincerely, JOHN HEYWOOD.'

'It is a very good business letter, Harold. Why did he write it on the office notepaper? I cannot help feeling that it ought to finish up, "Thanking

you in anticipation," or, "Hoping to be favoured with a continuance of your esteemed favours." '

It was the only trace of bitterness that Miss Agatha permitted herself.

'Mr. Heywood is a business man, Agatha, and my proposal was made in the most formal way to him.'

'Then you haven't spoken to Maggie yet?'

'Not yet.'

There was, even in a mind so inexperienced as Miss Agatha's, a faint impression that it was curious that Maggie Heywood had gone to bed uncertain whether she loved Harold, and had awoken convinced that she did. That was how Miss Agatha looked at it, that Maggie must 'love' the man whom she was to marry; but it is true that love conveyed very little to her. She was prepared to accept as the sort of love fitting in a Wesleyan minister's wife anything from respect, or gentle affection, to . . . what? How far she might go in this respect she hardly cared to think. Passionate love was a thing almost without her horizon; she did not associate it with her brother, and if she thought of it at all she thought of it as something sinful, connected with light women and restaurants and champagne. On reflection she considered that Maggie must always have had the utmost admiration for Harold as a good man, and must have enjoyed his society as a pleasant companion; and that she might well have concluded after a night's self-debate that she could pass a happy life with him, and could look after his domestic arrangements efficiently. More than that Miss Agatha could not reasonably expect a pure girl to take into consideration.

'I hope you will be very happy, Harold.'

'My dear Agatha. You don't mind?'

'I have no right to mind. I shall feel the separation . . . but it had to come some day.'

Mr. Simon kissed his sister affectionately. 'Well, well, it isn't coming just yet. Things don't move so quickly as all that.'

'She ought to think herself a very lucky girl.'

Miss Agatha went out of the room. First she went down into the kitchen to make the arrangements for midday dinner, and then she went up to her room and cried gently for nearly an hour. Mr. Simon went up into his study, prayed for a short time, wrote a note to Mr. Heywood, and devoted himself to the preparation of the sermon which he would preach on the morrow at Chiltern-with-Manby. He had chosen a text out of the fifth chapter of the Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, 'For we walk by faith, not by sight.' As he worked, jotting down notes and headlines, he often found himself thinking about Maggie Heywood, and wondering exactly how to address her that evening. In fact, the morning became more a period of preparation for the words he was to say on the Saturday night than for those he was to say on the Sunday. 'For we walk by faith. . . .' What did Maggie really know about him? How far was she taking him on trust? Might it not have been better to try and get to know from herself a little more about her feelings towards him before speaking to her father? How far had she been dazzled (God forgive him!) by the position he could offer her? She might have been flattered . . . amongst so many,

to be the one singled out for the devotion of the minister . . . there was something in that.

Why had he gone to meet her at the Midland Station; and why, having gone, did he not speak to her in the taxi? An admirable opportunity, if he had seized it and wasted no time. Yet you can hardly decently intercept a young lady returning from a holiday and propose to her at the station, before she has even unpacked her trunks. That would have been a proceeding so precipitate, after his previous scrupulously correct behaviour, that Mr. Simon could not imagine himself doing it. Yet he had gone to the station with some idea of doing it. Or had he gone to look at her once more, this girl with whom he had committed himself (although she was unaware of that), to look at her and reassure himself that he did not regret speaking to her father? No. He was certain he had gone deliberately because it had occurred to him that there was something cold about his method of seeking the hand of Maggie Heywood, and he had really intended to propose to her in the taxi. Why then had he confined himself to polite and kindly commonplaces? It was not that he was timid. He would shrink from no duty, no matter how unpleasant. If it had been necessary to speak to Mr. Heywood, say, about an unseemly flirtation with a female member of the chapel, Mr. Simon would have had no hesitation about doing so, in spite of his comparative youth and Mr. Heywood's years. (This is a suppositious case, of course; Mr. Heywood was a man of blameless morals.) And still he shrank with a sort of instinctive delicacy from putting Maggie into a position which might

embarrass her, or which he supposed would embarrass her, whatever she happened to think of the proposal. Mr. Simon had always thought of women with delicacy; he had fought shy of them as a boy, and of course as a student and a minister had permitted himself no freedoms with them.

Accordingly it was with a sense of insecurity quite unfamiliar to him that he walked up to the top of Willingdon Road about the middle of that Saturday afternoon, and turned to the left into Egerton Road on his way to the Heywoods. Mrs. Heywood was looking out of the drawing-room window when he arrived, and making an amicable sign to him she went to open the front door herself, though she felt, while she was doing it, that on a ceremonial occasion like this it might have been better to adopt a more formal attitude and allow Mary to answer the bell. However, her excitement got the better of her. All the morning Mrs. Heywood had been considering whether she and her husband ought not to address Mr. Simon as Harold, in order to make him at once feel at home in the house; but Mr. Heywood, consulted on his return home to the Saturday dinner, thought they had better wait a while and let things take their natural course.

Calling 'John' up the staircase, Mrs. Heywood led the way into the drawing-room, which had been specially cleaned out that morning, although it was not the regular day for cleaning out the drawing-room, and had been decorated with fresh flowers in honour of the occasion. Repressing her desire to embrace Mr. Simon, or, failing that, to weep or

at least to exhibit some sort of emotion worthy of the moment, Mrs. Heywood endeavoured to make it plain with dignity how moved and gratified she was by the happy turn of events. It had been decided that nothing should be said to Mr. Simon about Maggie's first decision, that she could not marry him; and so, even after Mr. Heywood had joined them, nothing took place in the drawing-room except a cordial pressure of hands and a few warm words of mutual congratulation that this ticklish business had been got through with so little difficulty; and when Mrs. Heywood at last began to ask Mr. Simon whether it really was true that the trams were to be extended to the end of Prince's Road, her husband rose and proposed that they should leave Mr. Simon alone and send Maggie into the room.

It had been Mrs. Heywood's desire that Maggie, like the drawing-room, should be decked out for the ceremony; but Maggie had positively declined to wear anything but the simple linen summer frock she would have worn had she been merely going up to the cricket-ground. When Mr. Simon heard her hand upon the door-knob and turned from the window to greet her, he thought she had never looked so simple and fresh and charming. A wave of pleasure passed over him, and he knew that he had done right in asking her to be his wife.

'My dear Maggie.'

'Mr. Simon——'

He strode masterfully towards her as she hung timidly by the door (and as he did so he reflected that it would be as well to get as far away from the

window as possible, because of the neighbours on the opposite side of the road), and took her firmly but respectfully in his arms. The embrace had all the correctness of a rite, there was nothing of the flesh about it, and yet Mr. Simon felt very tenderly towards this creature who had liked him well enough to entrust herself and her future into his hands.

'Mr. Simon——'

'Harold. You must call me Harold. No more of the "Mr. Simon," Maggie.'

Could one call this man 'Harold'? It was almost like calling a Cardinal Archbishop 'Bertie,' and yet it had to be done.

'Harold, there is one thing I ought to tell you. When my father first told me about you . . . I said that I didn't think I could marry you.'

'That is quite natural, Maggie. The whole thing was sprung on you so quickly. And every pure girl must feel instinctively, when it comes to the point, that she has a natural reluctance to place her life in the hands of a man who is, after all, no matter how well she may know him, a comparative stranger. That is all.'

'Yes,' said Maggie, as if she quite understood what Mr. Simon was driving at; though as a matter of fact she had never, when thinking about getting married in the abstract, viewed the placing of herself in the hands of a man, stranger or otherwise, in any other light but a pleasant and a welcome one.

'I felt that you ought to know this, Harold. I don't know whether father and mother told you.'

'Your father said you took the night for considera-

tion. I have the fullest sympathy and understanding. You felt you needed guidance.'

'Guidance?'

'Spiritual guidance, I mean. And it came to you in the night. You saw more clearly afterwards. It is often like that. I am glad you have told me; we must have no secrets from each other.'

Maggie had told him because she feared that Bobby or her parents might inadvertently let it out, but she had no objection to taking all the credit she could get for the action. She concluded that she had come through the preliminary ordeal of the first encounter with Harold very well, but she could not help wishing that he would not address her as if she were a character in an old-fashioned novel. He talked like Jane Austen, she decided. Or, in another way, he talked as if he were giving consolation to an afflicted sheep. He talked beautifully, she was aware, and with carefully chosen modulations and inflections of the voice, and no doubt as they got to know each other better he would adopt a more colloquial style. Meanwhile, she must try and live up to him. Getting engaged was after all a serious thing, very different from the boy and girl flirtations she had had long ago with Ritchie Brady and the other lads. They were empty and pointless, and she lost interest in them after a few days, which was very largely why she had had very little to do with young men lately. She had exhausted the possibilities of the little set she knew, and there had seemed hardly any chance of widening the circle outside the limits of Prince's Park. To be made love to by Mr. Simon was certainly a new experience, if an unexpected one, and she

determined to get as much satisfaction out of it as possible.

They went out for a walk together, and as they passed the cricket-ground he suggested that they should go inside, but Maggie had a curious reluctance to show herself with Harold just yet to the girls who would be sitting in the deck-chairs and the young men in flannels. Mr. Fergusson would be there, she remembered, and she wondered what Mr. Fergusson would think about her engagement. He would hardly think of her as the little provincial girl now, as she had some suspicion he had condescendingly done while they talked together about the London theatres.

'I would rather not go inside to-day, Harold.'

'Very well, my dear Maggie. You would rather we were alone. I quite understand.'

She asked herself whether he *did* quite understand, and also whether there was anything that he thought he didn't quite understand. But as she looked up at him striding along by her side, she observed that he was a fine figure of a man, and that his stalwart shoulders and vigorous moustache and prominent cheek-bones were not at all unattractive.

They walked together past Drake Farm, the Elizabethan house which had got stranded in the network of new roads that had lightly been thrown over the district; and they took a great deal of pleasure in looking at the peacock which lived there, and which was fortunately sitting on a fence as they passed by. Harold took even more pleasure than she did in the sight, and talked much about natural history, about which he knew a good deal.

Harold came back with her to tea, and even stayed a little in the evening talking politics with Mr. Heywood in the garden, but not very late because it was Sunday on the morrow.

And on the morrow Maggie and Mr. Heywood walked across to the Chiltern-with-Manby Chapel, where Harold was taking the service for the day, and sat under him for the good of their souls.

His text was : ' For we walk by faith, not by sight.'

## CHAPTER IV

It was decided that the wedding should take place some time in the late autumn, for there was no reason why they should delay. During the summer Maggie found herself more and more involved in little duties and engagements of a nature that, before her engagement, she had always scrupulously avoided entering into. She became a member of class, and stayed regularly to Holy Communion once a month after the service; she attended prayer-meetings, meetings of the Wesley Guild and the Ladies' Sewing Meetings, which, followed by a tea, were held every Thursday in a room behind the new schools.

It was extraordinary to Maggie how these exercises impressed and took hold upon her. Even the Ladies' Sewing Meetings were invested with some sort of sanctity, since the object of them was a worthy one. Of course, intellectually, she was shallow; she had never been developed or had been encouraged to try and develop herself, and it was by her emotions that she was drawn into this passionate interest in her new life. Harold's earnestness was infectious; whilst she permitted herself privately to criticise many of his actions, his influence subdued her natural taste for light amusement, and the vigour with which he entered into the business of the chapel completely

carried her away in his train. It was not that she lost her taste for excitement and variety, but somehow she found that taste satisfied, temporarily at least, by her new occupations. It was exciting to find Christ fully for the first time, under the diligent direction of the Rev. Harold Simon ; it was exciting to be engaged to a man who was, it seemed, on sufficiently good terms with Christ to be able to know what He thought about current affairs, and what He would have done in a particular case. Harold spoke with authority about such matters. There was no one to question him, and Maggie would not have dreamed of doing so in the early part of her engagement.

The trouble about this sort of religious enthusiasm is that it is forced, as it were, and brought on rapidly like a plant under glass. If the glass be removed or shattered the plant is likely to suffer. Such considerations did not occur to Mr. and Mrs. Heywood. The latter was impressed by the change in Maggie ; she found her more willing to do things about the house, and less impatient if she could not get her own way ; she found it only natural that Maggie should thus be dominated by the influence of the man who was to be her husband, and she thanked God that that man was a good man, and one fitted to cope with Maggie ; for Mrs. Heywood, like most mothers, knew a good deal more about her daughter's character than she had ever dared to say. Mr. Heywood looked on the change with a more material eye. He saw only that Maggie was adapting herself in a business-like way to the new duties she would have to perform, just as she would have had to adapt herself to the

turning of day into night if she had married a night-watchman, or the periodical absence of her husband for several years together if she had married a polar explorer. Only Bobby had his doubts, and he perhaps knew more about his sister than either Mr. or Mrs. Heywood. He kept his mouth closed at home, but abroad he scoffed openly at Maggie's having got religion, and even permitted himself a sly dig or two at her when there was no one by to reprove him. The asperity with which she defended herself from these attacks did not help to convince him that he was wrong.

'What is it to-night?' he said once as he was going off to cricket. 'Prayer-meeting?'

'Yes.'

'What do you do at them?'

'Never mind. You can't be expected to understand. Why don't you come and see for yourself?'

'Get up and relate your experiences? Why, you haven't had any to relate.'

'Bobby, you little swine, you 're jealous. I hate you.'

'Jealous? Why should I be jealous?'

'Because I 'm saved, and you 're not.'

Bobby disappeared chuckling, and Maggie walked off to the chapel in a frame of mind of which her Saviour would not have approved. Her principal desire was to be revenged on Bobby. Her fingers itched to pinch him.

The Ladies' Sewing Meeting was the only branch of activity connected with the chapel that gave Mr. Simon any serious trouble. He could manage the Guild, and the Sunday School, and the Stewards,

and the Quarterly Meeting with one hand tied behind his back, but at times he had to put forth all his strength properly to handle the Ladies' Sewing Meeting. Strange things happened there. During the previous winter, for instance, there had been a sensation because of mysterious injury done to hats and coats left by the ladies in a cloak-room while they were at work. On more than one occasion nearly all the hats had been found to be maliciously damaged when they were reclaimed by their owners. Feathers had been broken, ribbons cut, flowers torn out and strewed about the floor. The silk lining of a valuable cloak belonging to Mrs. Bladon Green had been ripped open with a sharp instrument. The affair was a complete mystery. It was thought that some boys had got into the room and played a practical joke, but when the same sort of thing was repeated more than once, it became evident that there was more in it than this. A watch was kept secretly, and it was discovered that a venerable and much respected maiden lady, who herself attended the Sewing Meetings, and was held in high esteem by everybody at the chapel, a Miss Batchelor, was actually the perpetrator of the outrage; and that, moreover, she had cunningly subjected her own garments to the maltreatment, and had loudly complained of the damage done, in order to avert suspicion from herself. It was never really explained why Miss Batchelor had acted thus, though there was a theory that maiden ladies of a certain age are liable to sudden accessions of eccentric behaviour; and shortly afterwards when Miss Batchelor left the district it was hinted that she had left it for a place

where she would be restrained from further aetivities of this nature. Nevertheless it was disturbing to Mr. Simon to find that one who had always been an indefatigable worker for the cause, and a regular worshipper, should so unaccountably forget herself; or perhaps it was disturbing that such a one should have been permitted by a Higher Power to forget herself. The opportunity for the ribaldry of the lewd was most deplorable.

Then there was the case of Mr. Edwards and Mrs. Hammerton. They were both esteemed chapel-goers; he was a widower, a retired greengroeer who had eome to live in one of the new houses in Manley Row, and she was a plump, well-preserved widow who maintained a millinery business in the eommereial portion of Prince's Road, under the name and style of Madame Hammerton. When she first began to attend the chapel she was looked upon with some disfavour by the staider members, for there was a smartness and dash about her dress that seemed to argue a lack of sobriety about her life; but as time went on her excellent behaviour and the regularity of her attendances at the chapel won for her much respect. There were some who said, however, that Madame Hammerton attended chapel so regularly in order to work up a connection for her millinery amongst the Wesleyan eommunity. But at any rate she kindly put her professional experience at the service of the Ladies' Sewing Meetings, where her co-operation was most highly appreciated.

It was eustomary for the minister and some of the older gentlemen to look in at the Sewing Meetings

at about five o'clock and have tea with the workers, thus causing a little pleasant diversion, and turning the affair into a sort of minor social function. Amongst the more assiduous frequenters of the teas was Mr. Edwards, as was only natural, considering that he was a retired man and had nothing to do with his afternoons. His presence was very welcome until it was observed that he made a point of sitting at the long tea-table beside Madame Hammerton, and nowhere else. At this discovery, made by some of the acuter spirits, all previous doubts and suspicions concerning Madame Hammerton instantly revived and raised their heads. Scandal was rife in the Sewing Meetings. It was true that Mr. Edwards, a scrubby little man with a chin-beard, was a widower, and there was no reason to doubt that his intentions towards Madame Hammerton were honourable; but there was a way of putting things at the Sewing Meetings, of putting them in confidence with the most innocent air, which would have made one doubt the chastity of the snow-capped peak of Everest. In vain did Madame Hammerton protest to Mrs. Bladon Green, in conference over a new hat, that Mr. Edwards had proposed to her three times, and that she could never think of accepting a scrubby little fellow like that, and that she had begged him not to pester her at the Sewing Meetings. It was generally felt that, if she wished, Madame Hammerton could find a means of disposing of Mr. Edwards, and that in truth she was rather flattered by his attentions, and was proud of parading them before her fellow-worshippers. It was felt that the Sewing Meeting

was no place for a religious woman to choose to carry on a flirtation, even a perfectly innocent one. It was represented to Mr. Simon that it was his duty to speak to the actors in this discreditable drama, and Mr. Simon, after a good deal of consideration, did so, and in consequence nearly lost two of his flock. Madame Hammerton actually gave up the Sewing Meetings (where her professional experience was so valuable), and was only prevented from leaving the chapel, said her detractors, because of the custom she obtained from its members. Even Mrs. Bladon Green, a comparatively wealthy woman, who bought most of her clothes at Batterfield's, Mendel and Kilner's, and the big shops in the centre of the city, often used to purchase hats from Madame Hammerton, both because she was a Wesleyan and because she had a way of adapting rather florid millinery to suit Mrs. Bladon Green's mature and massive proportions. It was said of some of her effects that they were quite Parisian.

Mr. Edwards took his pastor's reproof very philosophically on the whole, after his first moment of irritation, and continued to sit in a pew whence he obtained an excellent view of Madame Hammerton; to wait outside the porch after service and walk home with her if she would permit him. As a matter of fact Mr. Edwards and Madame Hammerton were an excellent and honest couple, and Mr. Simon soon regretted that he had ever mixed himself up in the affair, and ever after had at the bottom of his heart a distrust and misliking for the Sewing Meeting and for the opportunity it afforded for the clacking of idle tongues.

As the summer went on Maggie dropped more and more into the routine of what was to be her future life, and as she dropped into the routine she began to take less interest in the details. It even occurred to her sometimes that it was a pity Harold was not something else by profession than a minister, since he was tied by his duties when otherwise they might have been pleasantly employed. Once or twice on lovely July evenings she wished the prayer-meetings far enough, and thought with some slight regret of the girls who would be going out for walks along the lanes with their lovers instead of participating in the gradually palling joys of religious experiences. It had been entertaining at first to hear from the very lips of Miss Pennington, that staid, deliberate old creature who lived with her two maids and her three parrots in the house bequeathed to her by her grandfather, that at the age of seventeen she had had a more or less hand-to-hand conflict with the Evil One, whom she had finally routed with the blessed assistance of St. Paul. Upon this adventure Miss Pennington's reputation largely rested, and she would talk about it still at the age of sixty-two as a Crimean veteran might boast about storming the Redan. Maggie had no idea, as she contemplated Miss Pennington, what pleasure the Evil One could have taken in corrupting that lady, even at the age of seventeen.

But even if Harold had cut his duties and gone strolling in the twilight with her, would he then have been just like the lovers of other girls? It seemed doubtful if he would, even in the twilight. Such walks as they did take were dispassionate in

nature, and during them they discussed mostly local chapel politics, natural history, the characters of friends and relations. The most intimate topic touched upon with any frequency was the repainting and furnishing of the minister's house, to which Harold was hoping to induce the Stewards to consent, in honour of this unique occasion. He would often speak, too, of his sister Agatha, and tell Maggie how good she had been to him, and how kind they must be to her in order to prevent her from feeling the blow of separation from him too keenly. Maggie became almost jealous, retrospectively, of Agatha, and she asked herself whether she could ever hope to make Harold as happy as his sister had done. In that case, what was the good of Harold's marrying her, or of Harold's marrying anybody, for that matter? What was it that Harold wanted from her that he could not find in his sister? She would have understood if he had betrayed something stronger than mere affection, deep as that appeared to be. If he had forgotten himself so far as to kiss her roughly; or to let his hand slide round her shoulder and draw her to him as if he could not help it, without any regard for the consequences to her hair or her frock. If he had sometimes ignored the habits of the kingfisher, as they walked by the banks of the Seymer, and had said instead silly, foolish things that might have been sweet to them alone, if the veriest nonsense to an outsider. As it was there was nothing in his conversation that a third party might not have listened to with perfect propriety, or that would have made Maggie feel uncomfortable if a third party had been listening to it.

Invariably, when he quitted her, Harold would kiss her tenderly and respectfully, not quite upon her lips, but a little to one side, and would say, 'Good-bye, Maggie dear. God bless you.' And Maggie would perceive that she had parted from a good man. Which indeed was the case.

The truth was Harold Simon was not so lacking in the common instincts of men as he appeared to be, and there were times when, looking sideways at Maggie's clear profile, with the hair springing provokingly away from the temples, he had a violent desire to seize her and ravish those firm, red lips with his own, instead of dusting them delicately with the ends of his dark moustache. But he mastered this instinct because he felt it was a desire, and that as a rule desires were things to be fought against and conquered. So strongly did he feel this that he erred on the wrong side, as it were, and created an effect of coldness that he was far from feeling; or from wishing to create, either. Certainly he did not observe a lack of warmth in Maggie's attitude towards himself. It is not certain that he would have been glad if she had so far forgotten herself as to behave demonstratively to him, or to try and excite him to behave so to her. He would certainly have felt that such action was not maidenly, and if he had yielded would have afterwards regretted it very much indeed.

A simple man, he behaved simply according to his lights, and he was quite satisfied with the half of Maggie that he saw. It was not evident to him that he was only seeing one half of her, he had no suspicion of that fact. Entirely innocent of women,

he had no experience to guide him. He was like a sailor afloat on a strange sea, without compass, and without knowledge of the stars to stand in its stead. All he observed was the solemn beauty of the stars. Maggie, on the other hand, was well aware that she was only showing him one half of herself. She was perhaps not aware that she was doing so deliberately, that by suppressing part of herself she was acting a lie to him; if she had been aware of it she might have excused herself by saying that she was waiting for an opportunity to let him see more of her, an opportunity which he had no intention of giving her, apparently.

He was content to take her as she was, or rather as he thought she was.

## CHAPTER V

George Fergusson could stand a good deal of beer; when he had drunk three bottles quickly he was just beginning to feel happy, and ready to go on drinking more in the company of the genial spirits whom he met in the pavilion after cricket.

He was in this desirable condition one hot evening at the end of July, and as he leaned against the bar wondering whether to have another drink at once or wait awhile, there entered to him from the dressing-room Bobby Heywood, clad in nothing but a towel wrapped round his loins, seeking refreshment after his shower.

'What 'll you have, Bobby?'

'A gin and ginger won't do me any harm. Will it, Green?'

'Not as I know of, Mester Heywood,' replied the grinning Green, who during the day attended to the refreshment of the turf and at night to the refreshment of the members.

George decided to join Bobby, and ordered another beer, and whilst Green was serving the drinks he seized a napkin from the bar and amused himself by flicking Bobby on his bare legs, to which Bobby responded by trying to trip up George and lay him out upon the dusty floor; failing because, with nothing on his feet, he was at too great a disadvantage.

'My God, but it 's hot!' said George fervently, mopping his face with the napkin upon the conclusion of the sportive bout.

'Thank you, Mester Fergusson; that there napkin 's for wiping the glasses,' remarked Green.

Bobby drained his gin and ginger. 'I should like to go up the river one of these days,' he said.

'Come up on Sunday.'

'Sunday? Can't be done.'

'Of course, I forgot. Sunday 's a solemn day with you people. I 'm going.'

'Taking a girl?'

'No; I 'm going with Lavigne. I dare say we 'll run across some girls there. Couldn't you manage it for once, without them knowing at home?'

'Impossible, my dear chap. Why, I 've got to be at chapel.'

'God help you.'

'I wish I lived in "digs" like you, George.'

'Well, it 's not all beer and skittles living in "digs." But it does give a young fellow freedom, and teaches him something about life. I 've been in "digs" ever since I was eighteen.'

'All the time?'

George hesitated a second. 'Yes, practically all the time.'

'I wish you 'd come up the river some Saturday.'

'Saturday! It 's only half a day. Doesn't give you too much time.'

'Well, August Bank Holiday then.'

'There 's an awful crowd on Bank Holiday. Still, if one engages a boat beforehand, and gets right away early, it isn't so bad.'

The ' river,' to people in Salchester, is always the river at Chester, the Dee. One gets a good train that does the journey in about an hour (or better still one runs over in a car), and one takes well-filled luncheon-basket and flannels in a tennis-bag.

George had never until then accepted Mr. Heywood's invitation to visit the house ; but that evening, feeling pretty happy and comfortable after the four bottles of Worthington, he was persuaded by Bobby to brave the rigours of the Nonconformist interior. In the garden the tent was illuminated by a Chinese lantern, deck-chairs were strewn around, and on the dining-room table a light supper of bread and cheese, cake and stewed fruit, with lemonade, was going. He was introduced to the Rev. Harold Simon.

George was a man who always wanted to make himself liked. If he was not liked he drooped as a sunflower droops for the sun. In the warmth of popular favour he positively shone, his glasses glittered, and his beady eyes gleamed with pleasure, and he basked pleasantly in armchairs exhaling an atmosphere of bonhomie. But neglected he was miserable ; he was like a dog jealous of the arrival of a new baby ; he hung round pathetically thirsting for a sign of recognition. And to make sure that people should like him and make much of him he took a good deal of trouble to impress them in his favour. He was not merely polite to young girls because he was fond of them, he was polite to their mothers, their fathers, their brothers, in order to become popular in a house, and to get asked there often if he found himself comfortable. He rarely dined at home on Sundays. A solitary bachelor

dinner in lodgings was not to his taste, and he generally found means to obtain an invitation to some hospitable table or other. He had liked Maggie when first he met her, but then he had heard almost at once that she had become engaged; and since she who might have been expected to afford him some amusement of the kind that he principally affected was thus suddenly removed out of reach of his attentions, he had not troubled to explore an interior of a kind not exactly congenial to him. He was far from being a Puritan, and Nonconformists were to him a standing jest. He liked Bobby, but Bobby was a Nonconformist because he couldn't help it; he was a Nonconformist who was forced to conform to Nonconformity by a tyranny as rigid as that of the Inquisition. Besides, Bobby, in the free atmosphere away from home, jested about them with gusto, not to say with obscenity.

However, being led by accident into the Heywood's house, and finding it at any rate more comfortable and less aggressively Nonconformist than he had expected, George laid about him with a will to sow the seeds of friendliness. He was friendly with everybody. He was friendly with the Rev. Harold Simon, who found him an intelligent fellow, and one reasonably interested, for an outsider, in the movements of the Wesleyan Body. It is true that on the morrow George recounted some of Mr. Simon's conversation, with a very fair imitation of Mr. Simon's earnest manner, to the accompaniment of yells of laughter to some choice spirits in the Kimono Café during the after-luncheon coffee and smoke. But at the time he was very careful not to let Mr.

Simon see that he was amused, for he prided himself above all on being a gentleman. He did not need to trouble himself really, for Mr. Simon gave everybody credit for being as genuine as he was himself; and when George pretended to be interested in the details of the government of the Wesleyan Body, Mr. Simon took it for granted that he *was* interested, and never for one moment suspected that he was being listened to in an ironical spirit.

With Mrs. Heywood George was chivalrous. It pleased her, because no one troubled to be chivalrous to her now; and as he talked to her gaily, just as if she were a young woman, she kept putting her untidy wisps of hair back with the tips of her fingers, and she continued to smile in a faint faded way, rather like a tea-rose. She thought he was an awfully nice fellow, and a very good friend for Bobby to have, even though he was so very much older. He was assiduous in moving deck-chairs and handing lemonade.

George talked business with Mr. Heywood. Banking business, interesting tales of amusing things that happened in banks. Cotton also George talked, for that was Mr. Heywood's own business; and though it wasn't George's, every one can talk cotton more or less in the great cotton city of Salchester, for everybody lives by cotton directly or indirectly. To Maggie George talked rather less than to anybody else. It was as if he wished to convey to Mr. Simon tacitly, by his attitude, that he was a gentleman, and that there was nothing to be feared from him. He seemed to say, 'All right, my dear sir, I am fully aware that Miss Heywood is your property,

and I shall respect her just as I should expect you to respect her if she were mine. I shall try and be polite to her, since she is the daughter of my host, but nothing more.' Here again he was wasting pains and subtlety, for nothing was farther from Mr. Simon's thoughts than jealousy of George Fergusson. He had never been accustomed to look upon the world as a complicated tangle of men and women in a state of constantly changing relationships; everybody either getting fonder of somebody else, or getting tired of somebody else, or poised for a moment (which might last a week or a few years) in a passive condition of not liking or disliking. And it never occurred to him that Maggie, being engaged to him, could at the same time fall in love with anybody else, any more than it occurred to him that a newly inoculated person could catch the smallpox.

Said Bobby, helping himself to more stewed plums, 'We 're going up the river on Bank Holiday, George and I.'

'I 'd love to go up the river,' said Maggie.

'Why don't you get Mr. Simon to bring you along as well, Miss Heywood?' said George. Bobby looked blank, but revived when Mr. Simon said kindly:

'There is nothing that I should like better. I used to be very fond of rowing when I was at college at Richmond. But I 'm afraid I can't come on Bank Holiday. I 'm not free.'

'Now, Harold, you 're never going to work on Bank Holiday?' said Mr. Heywood.

'I have a wedding.'

'Who is it?'

'Mrs. Hammerton and Mr. Edwards.'

There was a mild sensation. 'My hat!' cried Bobby, 'you don't mean to say that 's coming off at last. What will they talk about at the Sewing Meetings next winter?'

Nobody took any notice of Bobby.

'They are very anxious that I shall marry them, in order to show that there is no ill-feeling about what took place some time ago, so I cannot refuse.'

'Bother!' said Maggie petulantly, 'there always seems to be some one to be married or buried whenever we want to do anything.'

Her eyebrows thickened, and a cloud seemed to hang above them threateningly.

'It 's extraordinary how inconsiderate some people are,' said George humorously. 'They never can choose the right time to die.'

His exquisite tact saved the situation, and everybody smiled.

'But there 's no reason why that should stop you, Maggie. You can go with Bobby and Mr. Fergusson, and you might get another girl to make up the fourth.'

'Violet Brady,' said Bobby. Bobby was rather fond of Violet Brady, and Maggie looked full at him with humorously compressed mouth to show that she knew why he had so suddenly brightened up. He didn't mind; Maggie never gave him away.

'I do hope you 'll be careful,' said Mrs. Heywood, nervously feeling for stray wisps of hair, and for a wonder finding none, since she had just previously been over the ground rather thoroughly. 'I always think that boats are such dangerous things.'

'They are if you fall out of them, mother dear,' said Bobby in his most superior tone. 'So are windows, for that matter.'

'But we aren't going to fall out, mother,' replied Maggie chillingly. So it was coming to this now, that at her age she was to be humiliated before a man of the world like Mr. Fergusson; talked to as if she was still a child! But George didn't seem to see any absurdity in Mrs. Heywood's remark. He pointed out soberly that the Dee boats were very safe, that the river was not so very wide, that he was an experienced hand at navigation, and that finally he could swim half a mile if necessary.

'But Maggie can't swim,' objected Mrs. Heywood.

'Whose fault is that?' retorted Maggie, who had often wished to learn, but had never been permitted.

'Never mind. Bobby and I can fish her out. But there won't be any necessity for that.'

'You never know. It doesn't do to be too certain, does it, Harold?'

'We are never certain of anything in this world,' said the Rev. Harold Simon.

'Or in the next one either,' added George inadvertently, with the sense that he had said rather a neat thing.

Mr. Simon, however, was not thus to be capped in aphorisms, especially aphorisms dealing with the subject with which he was professionally connected. He said gravely, 'We are only certain of the everlasting goodness and mercy of God. Of that we are always certain.'

Thus further speculation in that direction was

disposed of, and the conversation, after a reverent interval, was diverted into another channel.

Mr. Heywood, whose thoughts were never very far away from business (it was the passion of his life ; he loved it as a man may love painting or literature), took advantage of George's presence to draw him aside and ask what interest Persse's Bank would give on a deposit account.

' Well. An arrangment would be come to very easily. Is the amount much ? '

' A hundred pounds.'

' You could see the manager, or if it would save you trouble I would do so with pleasure.'

' The money is Maggie's, and the account would be opened in her name. It 's not very much, I know, but we may as well be getting interest on it as not.'

' Of course you wouldn't get very much. Couldn't you use it in some more profitable way ? '

' In the ordinary course of things I should suggest to Maggie that she put it in my business. I would have given her five per cent. But there are reasons why I 'm not very anxious to use this particular money. In fact, I 'm not quite sure that Maggie ought to touch it at all, and that 's why I feel it should be put away for her until she is old enough to decide for herself.'

George could not help feeling amused. Here was a man scrupulous enough to hesitate about accepting money, and yet sufficiently businesslike to have an eye to the interest in the meantime.

He said, ' Surely all money is alike, isn't it ? '

' A good deal depends upon how it has been got.

This particular money was got in a way of which we cannot approve.'

George was extraordinarily curious, but he could not decently question Mr. Heywood further. He made several guesses during the night at the possible source of the hundred pounds, and wild though some of them were, he was never within a thousand miles of the truth. The truth, in fact, was so incredible that he might well be excused for not approaching it. The fact was the money had been left to Maggie by a great-great-aunt on Mrs. Heywood's side, a Mrs. Surrey, who had amassed a comfortable income in the oldest and least honourable of the professions. Mrs. Surrey had been, in the hey-day of her youth, a woman of considerable personal charm and beauty, and she . . . well, she had made the most of these attractions. She had laid them out to the best advantage. And when she had found these attractions growing feebler, she had wisely retired from that branch of the profession, and had devoted herself to the other and even more profitable branch. She had presided over the rites instead of participating in them. She was well liked by both her clients and her staff. It was said of her that she was always decent to her girls. . . .

At the same time Mrs. Surrey had always regarded herself as a respectable woman. She had done these things in the way of business, without ever pretending to enjoy them more than was necessary for the proper carrying on of the business, and it was with something of relief that she saw herself at last in a position to retire on her profits and enjoy her well-earned repose. She selected for her autumn

days a quiet cathedral town, as so many veterans are apt to do, and here she devoted herself to religion and good works. Nobody, except a few relations, had any idea what her past had been, and those relations might be trusted to keep quiet, because they were very respectable people, and would wish to keep quiet for their own sakes, even if they had no thought of the money which Mrs. Surrey would one day leave behind her. At first none of them cared to have any communication with her, but as time went on (and Mrs. Surrey lived long and became a very old woman) residence in the cathedral town seemed to purge her, and first one and then another of the family got into touch with her and adopted some sort of formal relations. It cannot be said that the Heywoods, for instance, did anything more than just acknowledge her existence, but this much they did do, principally because they felt that her new life showed that she repented her former one; and also they remembered an admonition of their Saviour's (and hers), which gave them some countenance in their tolerance.

Once even Mrs. Surrey, passing through Salchester on her way from the cathedral city to the salubrious Lancashire watering-place of Blackpool, which she had not visited since her brighter badder days, actually called to see her great-niece, Mrs. Heywood. Maggie could just recall her, a gaunt wizened creature, all that once so palpitating flesh shrunk away to nothing. She wore widow's weeds. She had never been married. Her mourning was not for one husband, but for many, for all the husbands she had ever had. She took hold of Maggie, then a

tiny girl of ten, and held her at arm's length and stared at her. 'So you're Maggie, eh ?—Maggie. Did you know my name was Maggie, too ?'

Mrs. Heywood said she did.

'I suppose you didn't name her after me, eh ?'

They had not done so.

When she went away Mrs. Surrey gave Maggie half a crown, which Mrs. Heywood afterwards took away from her and put into the plate at the Anniversary, with the approval of her husband. They did not expect Mrs. Surrey to live much longer, but she actually survived for another dozen years or so, though they never saw her again. And when she died it was found that she had not forgotten that flying visit, and had left one hundred pounds to her great-great niece, because she was called Maggie.

This then was the hundred pounds about which there was now question. It was easy to put Mrs. Surrey's half-crown into the Anniversary plate, but when it came to a hundred pounds it was another matter. Maggie too was no longer a little girl to whom one might decline explanations about half-crowns, she was a woman of twenty-three, and it had to be made clear to her why there was some doubt whether a pure girl could fitly accept Mrs. Surrey's money. Of course the truth wasn't told her plump. She was only twenty-three, and unmarried. Mrs. Heywood said, 'Your great-aunt Surrey was not a good woman.'

'How do you mean, mother ?'

'Well, she was a bad woman.' Mrs. Heywood, flurried, did not look at her daughter, but pushed

back her hair agitatedly, hoping that Maggie would understand without troubling her to explain further, or that at least she would pretend to understand. Mrs. Heywood didn't know, such was the way she had brought up her only daughter, whether Maggie was capable of understanding; but she need not have doubted. Maggie knew more than her mother had known at the same age.

'A bad woman? Then ought we not to take her money?'

'We don't know, my dear. That 's what your father is worrying about.'

Mr. Simon was consulted. He was against investing it in John Heywood and Co. He thought the business would hardly prosper if tainted money were used to work it. He did not know how the rest of the capital had been acquired. He had never read *Widower's Houses*, nor had he even seen it performed at the Salchester Repertory Theatre, where it was justly popular.

So it was decided that the money should be put on one side and not touched at all for the present. That was the reason why Mr. Heywood had spoken to George about opening a deposit account with it at Persse's Bank. You get more interest when money is lying on deposit, and so long as it was lying at the bank it could be said to remain untouched.

But there was no reason why it should not earn the bigger rate of interest while it was remaining untouched.

## CHAPTER VI

At the Midland Station there was a large crowd waiting, even for the early train, but George and Bobby managed to secure a first-class carriage, which they occupied successfully to the exclusion of outsiders, with the assistance of their acquaintances the two Kennion boys, Arthur and Reggie, their sister Grace Kennion, and her young man Clifford Rawson, who were also waiting on the platform. They, too, were bound for the river, and for a moment there was some idea of their joining forces and making up a big party. Bobby, however, was jealous of Reggie, whom he suspected of casting favourable eyes upon Violet Brady; and since Bobby was standing Violet the treat he did not see the fun of handing her over for part of the time to a rival, so he determined to manœuvre the two groups into separate parties, especially when it was found that the Kennions had not taken the precaution to reserve a boat. It was suggested, however, that they might run across each other up the river, and a meeting was provisionally arranged for tea at Eccleston Ferry on their way down, for Maggie had suggested that they should only bring lunch with them, since if they brought tea as well it meant that most of the day was spent in preparing food.

At the boathouse the boys went up into the dressing-

room to change, whilst the girls sat on a bench and watched the pleasure-seekers embark.

Violet Brady was a bold black-haired damsel, well-developed, and of free manners. She was what Bobby called 'a bit of all right,' and he anticipated a good time. The Kennions had luck, and were soon off in a big boat with two pairs of oars, Grace and Clifford nestling on the cushions at the stern, and Reggie and Arthur rowing. They waved as they passed the girls, and Violet shamelessly kissed her hand to Reggie. Then George and Bobby came down, immaculate in clean tennis flannels.

'Now, then,' said George, 'who 's going to take the luncheon-basket ? '

'Why ? Won't it go in the boat ? ' said Maggie.

'Yes, but Bobby 's gone and engaged two small boats.'

'Oh, Bobby ! What did you do that for ? It 's much nicer to go all together.'

'Well, of course, that 's a matter of opinion,' replied the wily Bobby.

'Come along, Miss Heywood,' said George cheerily, 'it can't be helped. You 'll have to put up with me. You don't mind ? '

'Not if you don't.'

'I don't.' His little eyes shone brightly as he thought how delightful it would be on the river with this nice girl, and how agreeable he would make himself. Perhaps it wasn't altogether Bobby who was responsible for the suggestion that they should take two small boats instead of one large one. 'We 'll take the basket. I don't think it will be safe with Bobby.'

George handled a boat with more skill if less vigour than Bobby, and Maggie was conscious of a feeling of pleasure that she was in this particular boat as it disentangled itself neatly from the massed navies that clustered round the stages, in strong contrast to Bobby's craft, which was temporarily a centre of lurid storm. Maggie was almost sure, but not quite, that she heard Bobby swear at another navigator. However, once free, he darted away at a surprising rate, leaving Maggie and George to follow more leisurely.

'He 'll soon get tired of that,' said George, glancing over his shoulder without stopping his even stroke.

They passed along the wide sweep of the Dee just above the town, where the big houses look out across the stream to the low rich pastures on the other side, and gradually approached the more thickly wooded banks where there were no signs of habitations. But there were plenty of people, the river was crowded, and the little loaded steamers and the motor-launches and the busy police patrol boat kept up a constant bustle and excitement in the fairway.

'We want to get right up, away out of all this,' said George.

Soon they passed Bobby and Violet, though they nearly missed seeing the boat, which was drawn up against the bank under a low overhanging tree. Bobby was almost invisible, lying on his back on the bottom of the boat; a pink sock and a whiff of cigarette smoke alone betrayed his position. There seemed to be also a whiff of smoke coming from the cushions where Violet was ensconced, but Maggie was not quite sure. She had never seen Violet smoke.

George hailed the two. 'We 'll go on and find a good place for lunch. Follow us up until you run across us.'

'All right. Don't go too far.'

'It 's a good thing we 've got the basket, Miss Heywood,' remarked George.

'Yes, it is.'

Maggie did not find it immediately easy to talk to George. In the first place she was so indolently comfortable that she felt like dreaming away the day amongst the cushions, lulled by the ripple of the water and the gentle motion of the boat. And secondly this was the first time she had ever been alone with Mr. Fergusson, and she did not feel that the ordinary polite commonplaces that they would have said to each other if they had met by accident were quite the thing to indulge in now. They could not be made to last out the whole day, that was certain. And there was a sort of strangeness in being alone on the water with a man ; you were more intimately associated with him than on dry land. It was like being on a desert island with some one. You would have to be strangers or very great friends. There was no middle course. Maggie did not want to be frigid to George, she was too grateful to him for his kindness and the evident pleasure he took in escorting her. And so she did not know how to begin, when it came to conversation. However, George had no hesitation. Perhaps he had a formula.

He talked about the summer holidays.

'Where are you going ? '

'Mother and I are going to Criccieth, a week next Saturday. Bobby has been away, you know, and

father always goes in Whit-Week. We shall only stay a fortnight. Do you know Criccieth ? '

' Lloyd-George's place, isn't it ? ' inquired he in that facetious tone usually adopted by men of the world when speaking of the politician who was then Chancellor of the Exchequer.

' Yes. He has a house on a hill just outside. It 's a delightful little town.'

' I 'm sure it is. I wish I were going there.'

It was evident from his tone that he wished he was going, not because it was a delightful little town, nor because Mr. Lloyd-George lived there, but because Maggie Heywood was going to be there for a fortnight. At first she had an idea that she wanted to blush a little, and then quite surprisingly she said, ' Well, why don't you ? '

His tone assumed an infinite regret. ' I wish I could. But I 've made other arrangements.'

Other arrangements ! It was immense. He made arrangements for his holidays. He didn't write and engage a room, he made arrangements. Important interests seemed to be involved in his temporary withdrawal from the bank in Morley Street. She wanted very much to know what the arrangements were, and asked him.

' I 'm going abroad.'

Abroad ! He was actually going abroad ! And he said it with such an air of indifference, as if it was nothing to go abroad for his summer holidays. As if he was used to it ! Perhaps he was.

' Do you often go abroad ? ' she asked timidly.

' Whenever I can. I went to Norway last year. And the year before that to Normandy. This year

I 'm going to Antwerp and Brussels. I prefer to go to a French-speaking country, because I understand the language.'

'You speak French well ? '

'Enough to get on with the waiters and that sort of thing.' It was quite certain, from the studied diffidence of his tone, that he spoke it very well indeed, even well enough to understand what people were saying in railway carriages and at the theatres ! It was obvious that he was making a polite understatement of his abilities in order to keep her at her ease, and prevent her feeling shy in the presence of so much accomplishment.

'I wish I could speak French. I can read it a little bit.' It was true ; she had at home a couple of survivals from school, *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard,* and *Quand j'étais petit,* and a copy of *Eugénie Grandet* that some girl had lent her, and that she had forgotten to return. Sometimes she opened these and read a few pages with difficulty, for she was genuinely keen on knowing another language. Then she found the task stiff, and since the plots were not sufficiently exciting to cause her to wish to persevere she would lay the books aside for months.

'Read it ! Of course it 's awfully easy to read French. Very different matter from speaking it.'

'I suppose so,' she smiled apologetically.

'I can read it as easily as I can read English.'

'Can you, really ? '

'You ought to take a trip on the Continent some day.'

'I wish I could.'

There was silence for a while, and George steadily

urged the light skiff against the current, so easily and naturally as again to compel her admiration. He looked sturdy and well in his flannels. She wondered whether Harold would have thought of bringing flannels for a day on the river, or whether he would not have thought it enough to take off his coat and row in his shirt sleeves. She let her hand droop over the side into the water and watched him. Every now and then he paused to wipe away the perspiration which gathered in beads on his forehead and ran down into his eyes, dimming the surface of his glasses.

'Hot work,' he smiled. 'I should like a plunge.'

'Why don't you have one?'

'I dare say I shall, higher up, after lunch. I've brought a costume.'

Wonderful man! He knew the world and how to go about it. He was ready for any emergency. He was civilised, polished, urbane. She said suddenly: 'Do you know what I want most of all?'

'No.'

'To see life.'

He considered her. 'What do you mean exactly?' he asked cautiously.

'Life. I can't explain.'

'Life with a capital "L"?'

'Yes . . . I think so. All sorts of life. I only see such a little narrow side of it now.'

'You're not very old yet, you know.'

'But I'm going to be married.'

. . . . . .

*As was the case with the plays, Houghton had decided the full course of his story before writing. His notes are roughly set down in a kind of mental shorthand, but the intended argument is as follows :*

During the months still to come of Maggie's engagement George Fergusson was to be contrasted with the Rev. Harold Simon, and Maggie to be shown oscillating between the two men. Maggie is to ' see life,' and George arranges with Bobby to take them both to a music-hall. That day, however, Bobby, tempted to live up to the Fergusson standard, gets into trouble with his office accounts and bolts for Canada. George has Maggie to himself, and, returning in the taxi, tries to kiss her. They reach Argyll Road quarrelling, but the news of Bobby's exploit makes Maggie forget her indignation, and she agrees to meet George in Salchester to discuss Bobby. At tea in Salchester they are seen by Miss Simon and Mrs. Bladon Green, who decide that Maggie's parents must be told. First, however, they tax Maggie herself. She lies and, convicted, rushes out only to encounter George, who, finding her mood aptly rebellious, takes her, that hot September evening, for a walk in those fields where she had wished to walk with Harold instead of attending the prayer-meetings. George is too precipitate, and frightens her in time by his passion. She returns home to face Miss Simon and Mrs. Bladon Green, now reinforced by her parents. Shrinking now from George, she reacts with contrition to Harold. She confesses the flirtation, is forgiven, and the wedding day is fixed. She declines to see George, and, conscious of her rectitude, throws herself into

the chapel life vigorously. Again it palls. Harold is duller than ever. The excitement of her renewed religious fervour abates. She hears that George is to leave Salchester, and impulsively goes to his lodgings. He is packing up. She proposes to him. He is leaving for Paris on the morrow, which is also the eve of her wedding to Harold. George suggests Paris under promise of marriage. Maggie gets the hundred pounds of her legacy, and next day goes with George to Paris. The night at Paris. 'Two heads on the pillow next morning.' George has a wife already. Maggie is in blank despair but continues to live with him. She writes home she is married, and Mr. Heywood announces the marriage in the *Salchester Guardian*. The real wife calls on the Heywoods. Mr. Heywood goes to Paris. Maggie decides to stay there with George, who is speedily faithless.

The actual end is not clear from the notes. There is a note, 'Maggie goes on the streets,' and a further one, 'Maggie's religious feelings grow strong'; but at what point and in what condition it was intended finally to leave her is not now possible to decide.

# CASTS

## OF THE FIRST PRODUCTIONS

## OF THE PLAYS

# CASTS OF THE PLAYS

## THE DEAR DEPARTED

Produced at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, by Miss Horniman's Company, on 2nd November 1908, with the following cast :

| | |
|---|---|
| *Mrs. Slater* | Ada King |
| *Victoria Slater* | Enid Meek |
| *Henry Slater* | Henry Austin |
| *Mrs. Jordan* | Louise Holbrook |
| *Ben Jordan* | Joseph A. Keogh |
| *Abel Merryweather* | Edward Landor |

## INDEPENDENT MEANS

Produced at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, by Miss Horniman's Company, on 30th August 1909, with the following cast :

| | |
|---|---|
| *John Craven Forsyth* | Charles Bibby |
| *Mrs. Forsyth* | Miss Darragh |
| *Edgar Forsyth* | Basil Dean |
| *Sidney Forsyth* | Edyth Goodall |
| *Samuel Ritchie* | Henry Austin |
| *Jane Gregory* | Ada King |

## THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE

Produced at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, on 26th September 1910, by Miss Horniman's Company, with the following cast:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Mr. Ovens* | Herbert Lomas |
| *Edie* | Isabel Roland |
| *Mrs. Ovens* | Muriel Pratt |
| *Fred Ovens* | Milton Rosmer |
| *Mr. Skrimshire* | Frank Darch |
| *Dr. Jellicoe* | Edward Landor |

## THE YOUNGER GENERATION

Produced at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, on 21st November 1910, by Miss Horniman's Company, with the following cast:

| | |
|---|---|
| *James Henry Kennion* | Stanley Drewitt |
| *Mrs. Kennion* | Ada King |
| *Maggie* | Hilda Davies |
| *Reggie Kennion* | J. Vernon Bryant |
| *Grace Kennion* | Muriel Pratt |
| *Thomas Kennion* | Charles Bibby |
| *Mr. Leadbitter* | Cecil Brooking |
| *Mr. Fowle* | Edward Landor |
| *Arthur Kennion* | Milton Rosmer |
| *Mrs. Hannah Kennion* | Annie Möller |
| *Clifford Rawson* | Frank Darch |

## FANCY FREE

Produced at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, on 6th November 1911, by Mr. B. Iden Payne's Company, with the following cast :

| | |
|---|---|
| *Fancy* | Carrie Haase |
| *Alfred* | Esmé Percy |
| *Ethelbert* | B. Iden Payne |
| *Delia* | Mona Limerick |

## HINDLE WAKES

Produced at the Aldwych Theatre, London, on 16th June 1912, by Miss Horniman's Company, before the Incorporated Stage Society, with the following cast :

| | |
|---|---|
| *Mrs. Hawthorn* | Ada King |
| *Christopher Hawthorn* | Charles Bibby |
| *Fanny Hawthorn* | Edyth Goodall |
| *Mrs. Jeffcote* | Daisy England |
| *Nathaniel Jeffcote* | Herbert Lomas |
| *Alan Jeffcote* | J. V. Bryant |
| *Sir Timothy Farrar* | Edward Landor |
| *Beatrice Farrar* | Sybil Thorndike |
| *Ada* | Hilda Davies |

## PHIPPS

Produced, in a slightly different version, at the Garrick Theatre, London, by Mr. Arthur Bourchier, on 19th November 1912, with the following cast :

| | |
|---|---|
| *Phipps* | Arthur Bourchier |
| *Gerald* | A. E. Matthews |
| *Fanny* | Rosalie Toller |

## THE PERFECT CURE

Produced at the Apollo Theatre, London, by Mr. Charles Hawtrey, on 17th June 1913, with the following cast :

| | |
|---|---|
| *Vincent Cray* . . . | Charles Hawtrey |
| *Madge Cray* . . . | Cathleen Nesbitt |
| *Jack Probyn* . . . | Lyonel Watts |
| *Miss Scandrett* . . . | Maude Millett |

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